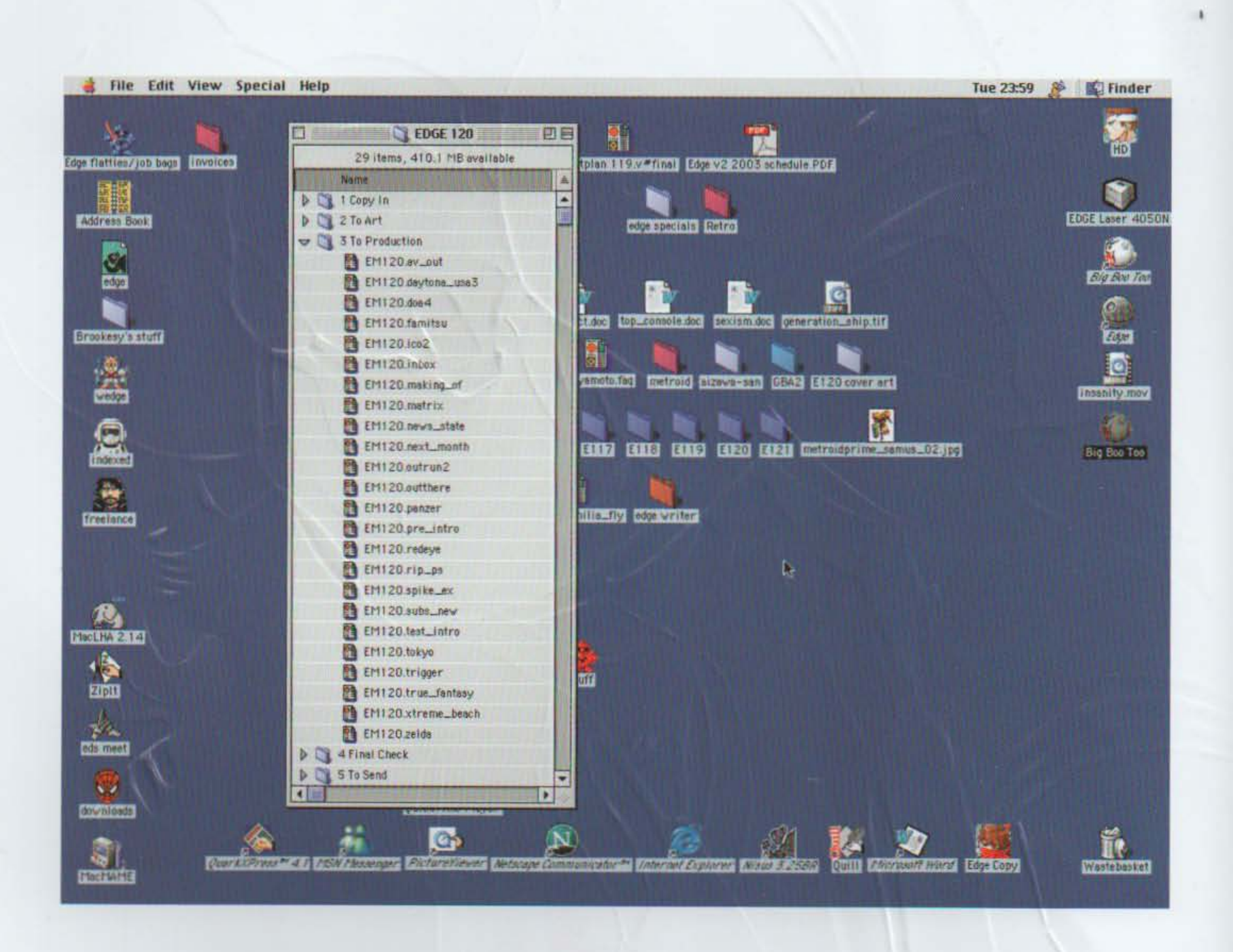


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Forget the plumber – for many gamers Samus Aran's return represents the GameCube's release of the year. The successful series, one of only a handful from Nintendo not to bear Shigeru Miyamoto's signature (though nevertheless exemplifying much of his design philosophy), was one of the few NCL franchises not to receive an N64 update. Much to the tenacious chagrin of *Super Metroid*'s massive – and predominantly American – fan base. Some eight years on, Nintendo has rewarded its principal audience's patience with two *Metroid* experiences in the same month, both of which you'll find appraised in this month's testscreen section.

The decision to grant custody of one of its brightest creations to a US developer with then-limited reputation had caused **Edge** to question the move on more than one occasion. In response, Miyamoto-san calmly explained it as the result of NCL's internal teams' craving for new challenges; their preference for the creative freedom offered by working on new franchises, he argued, over the need to negotiate the tighter constraints of sequel development.

There may be some truth in this, though it's difficult to ignore the fact that key instalments have traditionally remained in-house productions. A more likely scenario involves an increasingly US-centric Nintendo, one prepared to alienate its own domestic market (where firstperson gaming is largely dismissed) in favour of capitalising on the North American territory.

Regardless, that's a story for another time and doesn't detract from such a pleasant way to end the year. Being the last issue of 2002, **E**119's overall mood has mostly been reflective, preoccupied with the significant changes of the last 12 months. Videogaming doesn't look back, however, and with the console online plans (finally) going ahead 2003 promises another eventful 365 days.

Of course, if you're a PAL GC owner you benefit from the added advantage of having *Metroid Prime* to look forward to.



Features











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"There never was an Aaron, counsellor."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Mobile phone gaming comes of age

After WAP gaming's disastrous false start, mobile gaming finally looks set to take off thanks to new Java-enabled handsets. But what does the future hold?

Just a couple of years ago, mobile phone gaming was going to be the next big growth sector of gaming. It was ubiquitous at trade shows with a never-ending supply of specialist developers queuing up to benefit from low-cost development, and there were an equal number of experts touting research to suggest that the sector was about to take off.

However, since then it's all been a bit quiet. After the high-profile failure of WAP to attract anything other than meagre audiences, specialist developers started to disappear from the trade shows, publishers started to scale down their interest, and research began to adopt a more cautious tone.

find ways of getting their existing subscribers to give them more money, so they can pay back those expensive loans. Or as Ideaworks3D CEO, **Adrian Sack** puts it, "After stratospheric growth in the late-'90s, handset sales and revenue from peer to peer voice traffic has begun to level off. In the mobile industry, the brightest hopes for continued revenue growth are pinned on coming up with clever new ways of making money out of voice subscribers during the so called 'dead time' when they are not actually making phone calls."

And though the untold riches that WAP gaming once promised never materialised, there are still developers and publishers who can see the advantages of low cost

"After the high-profile crash in valuation of the telecom sector, mobile gaming is seen as a crucial sector for network operators"

Despite this disastrous start though, mobile phone gaming is still with us, and more significantly, it's back on the agenda. Indeed after the high-profile crash in valuation of the telecom sector, it's seen as a crucial sector for network operators whose bruises from the 3G licence auction still smart; with mobile phone uptake now maturing, operators are simply having to

development for a truly massmarket platform. Conventional videogame publishers are still interested in exporting their brands to the mobile sector; mmO2, for example, is working with a number of game suppliers and developers, including Motorola, THQ, Digital Bridges, Macrospace, MR. Goodliving, Sumea, Picofun and Ifone, while THQ is bringing

mm02

mmO2 claims to have launched the very first commercial Java games service in the UK with the O2 Games Arcade, which went live in September.

The service offers a wide selection of games to download onto Java-enabled handsets, including Atari classics such as *Asteroids* and *Pong* as well as other titles such as *Men in Black II* and *Denkiblocks!*

Around three new games are added each month. Games are charged on an 'event basis' similar to ringtones. Each game costs £1.50, plus a small download charge of around 30p, and remains active for 30 days.

Tim Raby, head of games, and **Nicola Aspin**, data marketing manager, O2.

Why is mm02 interested in games?

NA: We know that our customers want them, is the very obvious answer. We also recognise the business opportunity; we're expecting huge growth in this area and are well aware of the importance of games in attracting new target audiences.

Why are mobile phone companies so keen to promote mobile phone gaming right now?

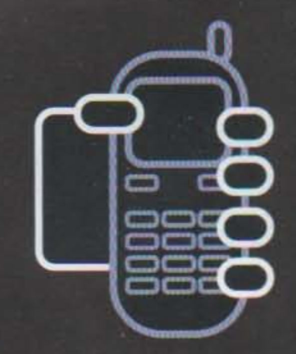
TR: 02 has always offered games, but the 02 Games Arcade is a Java proposition, which means that the user experience is different. Gaming on mobile phones has been very big from a usage perspective for a long time – games such as *Snake* are played by a huge number of people every day. Java gives the functionality of an embedded game with a greater degree of choice as to what games are on your phone. Of course, it's also a revenue opportunity for us.

What are the business models that underpin mobile phone gaming?

TR: If you compare us to Vodafone Live, it's offering a similar range of games at a price of about £3–5, whereas we're offering them for about £1.50, which clearly represents a difference of philosophy. We base our model on event-based charging and revenue sharing. We essentially take on the role of publisher – we're spending marketing money and we're retailing the product.

How close is the mobile phone industry to a common technological platform?

Clearly J2ME is technically a standard, but in truth, to write a very high quality game, developers will have to tailor it to different devices. But that doesn't really interfere with the user experience – if you download a game from us it'll be the same game whatever handset you've got.



Orange

Orange has been spearheading its games campaign with the Sagem my-G5 handset, which comes with ten downloadable games titles and a console-style keypad. Orange's wirefree service currently consists of 11 titles, including *World Wrestling Entertainment*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, *The Weakest Link*, and Orange's own *DinoIsland*.

James Kaye, UK games manager, Orange UK

Why are mobile phone companies so keen to promote mobile phone gaming right now?

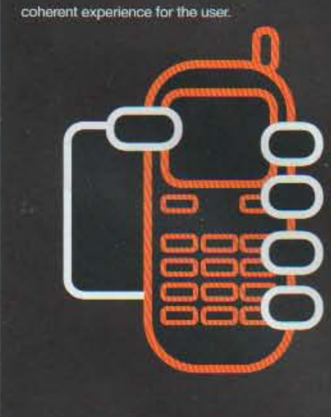
The initial drive to get people playing mobile games was really successful; games account for a substantial percentage of WAP traffic. Now, with the introduction of Java technology, the games are graphically superior, and they are beginning to meet the average user's expectations of what games should look like and sound like.

What are the business models that underpin mobile phone gaming?

It's not really any different from the conventional videogame business model. Generally we're finding that we've got excellent relationships with handset manufacturers, and then thirdparty publishers create a wide range of games content.

How close is the mobile phone industry to a common technological platform?

The best you can do is try to produce content that will work across every Java-enabled handset that you've got, but that isn't always going to be the case. So there are issues and until there's an industry-wide standard, that's not going to go away. We've used In-Fusio in our initial handsets because it's a good attempt at a standard and it produces a coherent experience for the user.



Worms to mobile devices. Even Microsoft has made its entry into the mobile sector by virtue of its recently launched Orange SPV Smartphone, no doubt hoping that the mobile sector will prove a useful alternative to a slowing PC market.

Level playing field

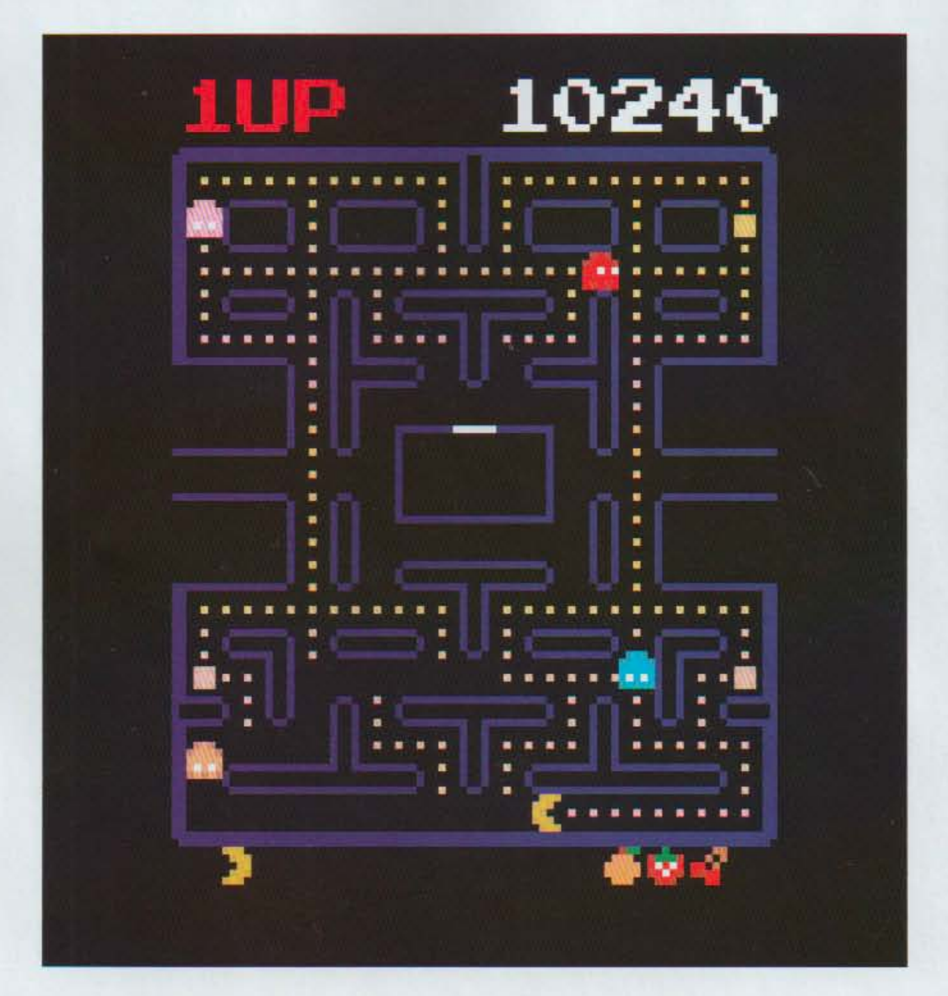
Kuju is one such developer that has stuck with the sector even though it's not as fashionable as it was a few years ago. "We've got quite a few people developing mobile games and it's a very exciting area," explains the company's business development director, **Ian Baverstock**. "It's not our core business, and it's a tiny proportion of our turnover and our staff, but it's a level playing field – a bit like the games industry was in the '80s. Therefore the opportunities are huge because there aren't any big incumbent players that can dominate the market." And since the Gartner Group estimates that by 2004 there will be 177m wireless gamers worldwide, with 102m in Europe, the size of the market is potentially vast. Another research agency, Ovum, is predicting that the global wireless gaming market will be worth $1bn (£630m) by 2004, and $4.3bn (£2.7m) by 2006.

Another fact that illustrates the continued interest in the sector is that Nokia expects to ship 50–100m Java-enabled colour handsets next year. And it's Java, or more specifically, its mobile variant J2ME, that is driving the resurgent interest in mobile phone gaming from operators, handset manufacturers, publishers and developers. Java technology, combined with GPRS networks, makes downloading games to a handset quick and easy. Most UK operators are offering downloadable games on a rental basis, with a month's use costing in the region of £1–5. And unlike their WAP predecessors, Java mobile games aren't executed by a central server. Consequently, Java games are more likely to be compared to conventional console games by the general public, benefiting from the colour screens and polyphonic sound of new handset models.

Indeed, despite their similarity to traditional games, wireless networks offer the potential for much more advanced, communication- or location-based gameplay, but operators and handset manufacturers have wisely decided to introduce their subscribers to Java games by stealth. "I think that people will start out playing simple Java games that are similar to the ones they're used to, but I think it will grow via high score uploads through to more connected games," explains Baverstock. "It will take a while for the consumer to get used to more complicated games though. And at the same time, handsets will get more powerful, with more available memory and so on, and the games will get better."

To a certain extent, the sort of cross-platform, pervasive gaming that mobile gaming proponents argue will appear in the future is already, theoretically, with us. Infinite Ventures, for example, has developed what it calls Play-By-Sync technology to deliver multiplayer gaming to Pocket PCs, Smartphones, and Palm OS5 devices. The first game to take advantage of the technology is turn-based

> "Research agency Ovum is predicting that the global wireless gaming market will be worth £630m by 2004, and £2.7m by 2006"





The new breed of Java-enabled handset allows a much more sophisticated gaming experience than that offered by static WAP titles. The first wave of games includes ports such as *Pac-Man*

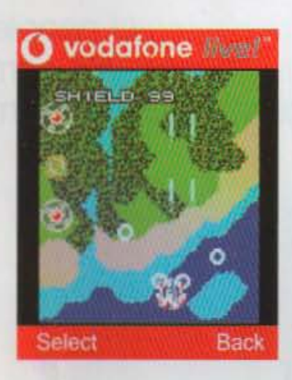
strategy title, *Lands of Shadowgate* (www.landsofshadowgate.com). Players will be able to access the game through a variety of devices, and plans are afoot to convert it to J2ME and Symbian compatible phones including the new Series 60 phones. Other experiments with pervasive gaming are being taken by Scott Orr, one of the co-creators of *John Madden Football* (see p104). His company, Sorrent (www.sorrent.com) has created a series of games that feature a 'convergent character', which is essentially a single avatar for use across several titles. Significantly, the skills of this avatar can be improved in one title, with effect across all the other compatible titles. On top of that, the games have been ported to the PC so you can play them on your PC and improve your character's skill levels there.

Handheld standards

Some idea of what sort of technology can be expected from mobile handsets in the near future can be gained from examining the current standards of handheld computing devices such as Compaq's iPAQ. Softwide, for example, currently offers a wide selection of games for Pocket PC and Palm devices through its stores and its Website, ranging from the sophisticated, such as perfect ports of *Tomb Raider* and *Rayman*, to the simple, such as *3D Air Hockey* and *Gangsta Race*. The release of the Windows-operated Orange SPV highlights the growing similarities between handheld computers and mobile phones, as Sack points out, "A Nokia 7550 or Orange Smartphone SPV running in excess of 100Mhz is capable of delivering a gaming experience that is substantially superior to anything that might be achieved on a 16Mhz GBA. Add to this, the fact that both devices have the ability

Vodafone's Live! GPRS service has just been launched with a star-studded publicity campaign, emphasising games such as *Space Invaders* (below, top) and *Stormy Sight* (below, bottom)







T-Mobile

T-Mobile also claims to have been the first UK operator to launch downloadable Java games in June. The company currently offers 21 games. Initially the games will be available for free, but from next year, they will cost £1 for 30 days unlimited access to the game, or £2–3 for 30 days' access to a 'premium game'. The line-up includes: *Siberian Strike*, *Rail Rider* and *Prince of Persia*.

Alison Enticknap from T-Mobile

Why is T-Mobile interested in games?

Because our customers are. Also from a company perspective, gaming also allows us to capitalise on the investment we've made in our network by providing relevant and appealing content to our customers.

Why are mobile phone companies so keen to promote mobile phone gaming right now?

The main driver has been the launch of handsets with Java technology, combined with improvements in the quality of the games available. We can now offer customers a richer gaming experience with colour games, sounds and moving graphics. Enhancements to mobile operators' billing systems will also streamline the customer experience. We are currently going through a 'shakeout' period where handset manufacturers, operators, and independents are all trying to establish themselves as the first port of call for mobile games. This level of competition means it will ultimately be consumers who will benefit.

What are the business models that underpin mobile phone gaming?

Ultimately operators have the billing relationship with customers allowing customers to simply purchase or rent a game with the cost charged straight to their account.



Vodafone

Vodafone has launched its Vodafone Live! GPRS service with a flurry of marketing activity, including a star-studded TV ad campaign. Its Games Arcade offers a variety of games, including *Space Invaders* and *Puzzle Bobble*, that range in price from £1–£5, though some are actually free.

Suresh Sudera, UK product manager, Gaming

What sort of technological advances are fuelling the current resurgence in mobile gaming development activity?

With the success of Java games in Japan we have seen advances in the capability to support downloadable games at the network level as well as Java technology ingress into the majority of phones available now and in the future. The quality of the newer handsets such as the Sharp GX10 with full colour, and a larger screen coupled with better sound makes the whole 'arcade style' gaming experience far better than before.

How close is the mobile phone industry to a common technological platform?

Handsets currently utilise various operating systems and this will surely continue. However, it is becoming more evident that device manufacturers are keen to integrate Java technology into their handsets regardless of the OS. So maybe we are seeing evidence of commonality?

What is Vodafone doing to differentiate its offering from those of its competitors?

Vodafone Live! is a totally new consumer proposition. It brings together gaming, picture messaging, polyphonic ring tones and content under one easy to use colour menu. Games available for the Sharp GX10 utilise a special set of specific technology that allows the games to make use of the functionality of the phone – vibration, polyphonic ring tones, flashing to provide a superior customer experience.

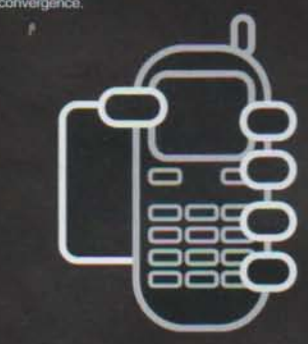
Motorola

Motorola has recently started promoting its T720 Java compatible handset, which features a high-resolution colour flip screen and comes packaged with with *Breakout*, *Tetris* and a *MotoGP* demo.

Kenny Mathers, senior content product manager for gaming, Motorola

What does the future hold for mobile gaming?

We are currently at the download and play stage; in the next three months players will also be able to post high scores and we'll move towards chat rooms, hints and tips, and league tables; and by the summer we'll hopefully see turn-based multiplayer games. Moving forward from there, when we start to see Bluetooth-enabled devices we'll start to see realtime peer-to-peer games. As 3G evolves we'll then start to see realtime multiplayer games, overlaid with sophisticated community features and additional communication features integrated into the games. 3G will also enable location-based gaming, and eventually cross-platform convergence.



Nokia

Of all the companies working hard to make mobile gaming a reality, Nokia is arguably doing the most. *Game 2002* was played by over 1m players across 25 countries, who received clues and information from a number of platforms, including the Internet and SMS text messaging. In addition, it plans to launch a series of dedicated game phones, and has announced a partnership with Sega to produce games for them. The first device in its mobile game deck category is called the N-Gage which runs on the Nokia Series 60 platform and the Symbian OS. Significantly, games will be packaged on memory cards, which is a move away from the Java download model.

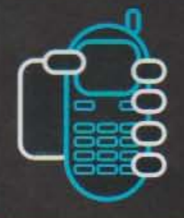
Vesa-Pekka Kirsi, senior manager, games applications for Nokia

What are you doing to distinguish your offering from that of your competitors?

We're trying to avoid fragmentation and to avoid proprietary solutions, and essentially avoid anything that makes it more difficult for developers to develop for mobile handsets. Every single handset is different, and if you compare our handsets with another vendor's handsets there's even more differences, so it's a very fragmented market when it comes to developing games. So we're doing everything we can to drive standardisation across Nokia platforms and across vendors. We also want to make our handsets more interesting and more capable than those of the competition, but we'd rather not reveal how we're going to do that. We also have phones that run on the Symbian platform, which gives developers access to different communication layers, and Symbian phones typically have more memory space than Java handsets.

What does the future hold?

I came to the industry two years ago, when everyone was hyping WAP and SMS games, and it did kind of collapse. But there is a lot more promise today than there was then. The handsets themselves have increased to a level where you can play games that actually look good and are simple to play. So it's a lot more realistic to expect the public to play games on their phones now. And the operators are promoting mobile gaming much more aggressively than they did with WAP games, and their offerings are much more coherent. And in terms of the supply of games, Nokia alone is dealing with more than 100 developers working on Java titles, so there's a very promising portfolio of games available now and in the near future. And a lot of big names, like Namco and Taito, are increasingly devoting their attention to the sector.



to pull down wireless data at a speed just a shade lower than a 56K modem and the possibilities become obvious."

Another dimension

"One of the drivers of handset technology is the need of manufacturers and operators to deliver rich enough content to justify the cost that's levied on it. Orange's Smartphone SPV is running at maybe half the speed of an iPAQ and it's already at a price that's falling to a level that's standard for a phone. ATI already ships a graphics accelerator with a Pocket PC, and so it's purely a question of time; high-end 3D gaming on mobile phones is going to arrive, it's just a question of how long it will be before it does."

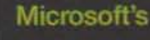
One advantage for developers of Microsoft's entry into the sector is that it will introduce some well known standards. "The long and short is that if you can develop for the PC, the development skills are familiar to help you target the Pocket PC and Smartphone platform," argues **Steve Clayton** from the company's mobile devices division. "If you are developing a game for the Pocket PC you can use GAPIs (Gaming APIs), which are basically a vast library of resources that help speed up the whole development process. In addition, GAPI offers a fast way of moving focus in and out of full-screen mode, so if your game session is interrupted by an appointment reminder or phone call, it pauses until focus is restored. GAPI also allows you to easily map functions to hardware buttons on the device and offers fast resolution times."

Nevertheless, a lack of common technological standards is one of the biggest drawbacks of the mobile phone gaming sector as it currently exists. While J2ME is a standard of sorts, there are other variants of Java for phones, such as In-Fusio's ExEn standard, which is used by Orange, and there's also other technologies, such as Symbian that are used in mobile handsets. An interesting development is Nokia's new game-dedicated N-Gage handset which aims to bring in a degree of technological consistency, but also threatens to split the mobile gaming demographic into two different constituencies. By offering more complex games on memory cartridges through traditional retail channels, it offers the possibility

"We're aiming at people who've got time on their hands. We want to give them more things to do with their mobile phones"







of even more sophisticated games. "2.5G or even 3G Wireless data is not likely to be a viable method for delivering modern console quality games to mobile devices for quite some time," explains Sack. "The bandwidth is far too low and the costs far too prohibitive. The answer in the short to medium term lies in good old fashion cartridge based delivery of games at retail. N-Gage is a mobile console that offers an integrated GPRS wireless connection that can be used for over the air multiplay. This immediately sets it apart in the handheld gaming space."

Gamers in mind

It also offers a keypad that's been designed with gaming in mind, but as mm02's **Tim Raby** argues, it clearly won't have the same degree of appeal to mainstream phone users as it does to dedicated and active mobile phone gamers. "The N-Gage is doing something very different to a mobile phone – it's emulating a Game Boy. We generally support what Nokia does with its devices, and it's a brave move, but it will be interesting to see how it does with consumers because it's obviously a very specialised device. Whether we support it substantially or not, it will only be a small part of what we do, because it will be a niche. The O2 Games Arcade is a massmarket application and it's not just aimed at traditional gamers – that's not what these devices are about.

We're aiming at people who've got time on their hands. We want to give them more things to do with their mobile phones."

Perhaps the really interesting thing, though, about mobile gaming, is that it might offer a glimpse of the future for the conventional videogame sector. "There's a much broader demographic mix than the conventional games industry, which is attractive because that's where I believe the conventional games industry will end up – reaching consumers who aren't very easy to reach via consoles," argues Baverstock. "There's also the fact that distribution is electronic from day one; there's no stock risk, and there's no retail element for Java games. So there's lots of stuff that you can learn for what I think the future of the games industry will be by being active in the mobile sector. I think that the future business models of the conventional videogame industry will be proven in this space to some extent."

Certainly with the transition towards a connected vision of console gaming, publishers and developers might see mobile gaming as a low-cost opportunity to experiment. It's also clearly a source of revenue in itself, and with dedicated handsets beginning to appear, also a source of potentially rich gaming experiences. And while it might be premature to say that mobile gaming has come of age, the future's certainly bright.

Microsoft's

Microsoft's entry into the mobile space should come as no surprise; like the Xbox, it's an attempt to diversify in the face of slowing PC sales. The company has consequently joined forces with Orange to produce the Orange SPV Smartphone, powered by Windows. It essentially boasts all the functionality of a PDA and comes bundled with a game developed by Ideaworks3D called *Rebound!* which was designed by Dan Malone, who worked on *Chaos Engine* and *Speedball 2*. It retails for £179.

Steve Clayton, device specialist, Mobile Devices Division, Microsoft EMEA

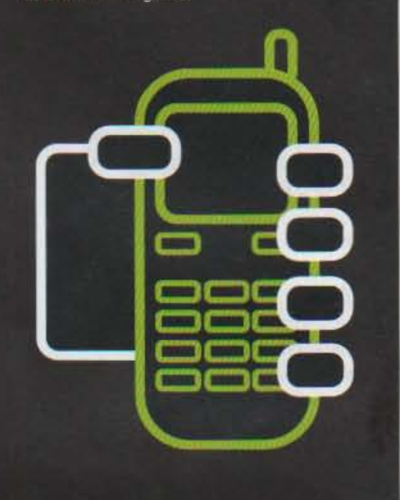
What exactly is Microsoft doing in the mobile games sector?

Microsoft's Mobile2Market program is designed to assist mobile operators, independent software vendors (ISVs), and cataloguing and certification partners with identifying mobile applications for secure, manageable and reliable deployment on next-generation wireless networks. The Mobile Solutions Partner Program (MSPP), which currently has nearly 7000 members worldwide, offers developers access to a number of technical and marketing resources to help bring their applications to market.

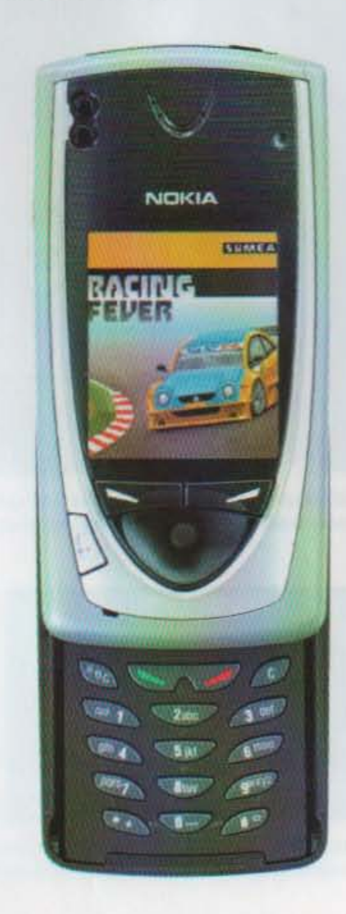
What does the future hold for mobile gaming?

If you take a look at Pocket PC and Smartphone games versus other platforms, you will see a richer set of games already available and many more coming along. The Smartphone has a 120Mhz processor and high-resolution colour screens on both platforms and with removable memory the potential is there to make games portable. The developer community for Microsoft platforms can easily shift to Smartphone and Pocket PC and generate additional revenues from a completely new base of users.

Going forward we're just going to see an incredible amount of exciting games. Games like *Tomb Raider*, *Tennis Addict*, *Slurp & Rebound* are coming out already and we expect to see many more of these types of games moving over to the new platforms as well as great new games that take advantage of the fact that you're mobile, such as location-based games.









GameCube gets Game Boy Player

Nintendo proposes novel solution to the problem of the Game Boy Advance's dim screen

Nintendo has announced a peripheral for the GameCube that will allow Game Boy software to be played on the console. The GameCube Game Boy Player is set to receive its Japanese launch in March, where it will retail for ¥5,000 (£26), with a US release to follow in May, and a European release later in the year. The device allows the entire back catalogue of Game Boy, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance software to be played on a TV screen – though **Edge** can't help thinking that it's a bit of a convoluted solution to the problem of the murky GBA screen.

Peripheral vision

The add-on consists of a one-inch platform that connects to the bottom of the GameCube and a boot disk, and players control the action either via a conventional GameCube controller or WaveBird, or a Game Boy Advance attached via link cable. In addition to playing Game Boy software it also supports multiplayer action via link cable, with one player using the TV screen while others use their GBA screens. And aesthetically minded gamers will no doubt be pleased to learn that the device will come in four colours to match the four GameCube models currently available.

Of course, it's not the first time such a device has been released – the Super Game Boy SNES peripheral also allowed Game Boy software to be played on a home console, and several thirdparty manufacturers have produced peripherals with similar functionality. But Nintendo's current decision is a clear bid to address the stagnation of the GBA market. For some time now, thirdparty publishers have been reluctant to commit resources to Nintendo's handheld – a fact acknowledged by CESA during a recent presentation to a British Council delegation.



The Game Boy Player is the latest add-on to increase the functionality of the GBA

Indeed though sales of GBA hardware have surged in recent weeks in Japan, software sales remain static – particularly for thirdparty titles. Bloomberg recently reported that the company spent ¥25.9bn (£130m) buying back its own shares at the end of October in a bid to maintain its share price having cut its sales forecast for both GameCube and Game Boy Advance, citing waning demand.

But though investors and financial analysts have expressed scepticism about the potential of the new peripheral to drive hardware sales, the new peripheral is certainly a desirable piece of kit, and the announcement coincides with a flurry of activity on GBA. Prominent recent launches like *Metroid Fusion* are complemented by a strong release schedule that includes *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, which belies the troubled times that GBA developers (such as Crawfish Interactive– see p15) find themselves in.

In related news, and just as **Edge** goes to press, Nintendo is expected to announce two major titles at the Jump Festa 2002 on December 22. It's rumoured that one of the titles will, controversially, be a non-cel-shaded *Zelda* title. Expect full coverage of any announcements in the next issue.

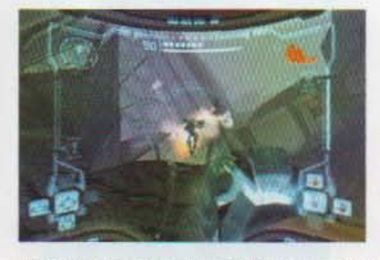




Although sales of software for the GBA continue to disappoint, it's a platform that boasts more than its fair share of innovation, such as motion-sensing and light-sensing games



Edge wonders what the impact of the Game Boy Advance's roster of SNES remakes, combined with the new Game Boy Player will have on second-hand SNES sales...





Metroid Prime and *Metroid Fusion* are among the latest titles to highlight the potential of GameCube/GBA connectivity, which is set to become more intimate with the new add-on

Square and Enix join forces

Japanese publishing powerhouses aim to exploit RPG synergies to take on western thirdparties







Square's success in the west, combined with Enix's domestic success, the new company is likely to be a powerhouse

Two of Japan's most respected publishers, Square and Enix, have announced that they are to merge operations to form a new company called Square Enix in a bid to compete with European and US thirdparty publishers. Under the terms of the merger, which is intended to be completed by April 2003, Square's assets and liabilities will be absorbed by Enix to form the new company, which will be headed by Yoichi Wada, the current president of Square. In addition to creating a potential publishing powerhouse with a truly global reach, the deal would also seem to end speculation that Enix might be a viable acquisition target for Microsoft in the company's bid to enlarge the Xbox footprint in Japan.

A statement to investors explained the rationale behind the merger: "In the ever-changing world of entertainment software, the most important issue facing companies today is how quickly they can grow as the marketplace and opportunities for business expand and diversify. Together, we will aim to become producer of the highest quality digital content in the world." Outlining the broad strategy of the new entity, the management of the two companies highlighted broadband network gaming and overseas software sales as areas of potential growth. It was also argued that the merged entity will be able to reduce development costs by exploiting the development synergies that exist between Square, which boasts its own internal development teams, and Enix, which outsources every element of production.

The deal, described as an offensive move for both parties, clearly makes sense in light of CESA's recent Games White Paper, which demonstrates the need for Japanese publishers to pursue success in foreign territories in light of ever-increasing development costs. And although Square has recovered financially from its disastrous recent foray into film-making, the company was expecting to post disappointing financial results for 2002, and international success to match its domestic levels of recognition continues to elude Enix.

Summing up the deal, Enix president **Keiji Honda** stated, "Our styles are different, but our ways of thinking are the same. I want to make games that the whole world will say are great. I'd like to create something that'll be unlike anything users have ever seen in their lifetimes." Nevertheless, the deal isn't expected to alter the release schedules of the two companies in the short-term; while Square continues to work on *Final Fantasy XII* and *Final Fantasy X-2*, Enix currently has 25 titles in development, mainly for PlayStation2.

Going global

In an attempt to highlight the synergies between the two companies, the merger announcement was accompanied by a summary of the biggest selling games published by the two companies, to demonstrate the global synergies generated by Square's traditional strength the US and Europe, and that of Enix in the domestic Japanese market.

	Total Sales in millions	Japan	Overseas
Square			
Final Fantasy VII	9.2	3.9	5.3
Final Fantasy X	5.4	2.7	2.7
Chrono Trigger	2.9	2.3	0.6
Kingdom Hearts	2.3	0.9	1.4
Final Fantasy Tactics	2.2	1.3	0.9
Enix			
Dragon Quest VII	4.1	4.1	n/a
Dragon Quest III	3.8	3.8	n/a
Dragon Quest V	2.8	2.8	n/a
Dragon Quest Monsters	2.4	2.4	n/a

CUTTINGS



Never say never again
Atari has announced the first official expansion pack for BioWare's groundbreaking RPG, *Neverwinter Nights*. *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide* is currently under development by Floodgate Entertainment, a team largely made up of ex-Looking Glass developers, and is scheduled for release in Spring 2003. In addition to providing a 40-hour singleplayer campaign, the pack also adds new features for the Aurora Toolset, including monsters and additional character classes. BioWare is set to follow up with its own expansion later in the year.

Videogame teaching aids
The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency has launched a virtual conference in association with Learning and Teaching Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland to discuss the potential influence of videogames on information technology in education. Speakers include teachers, education software developers and games industry representatives, who will be discussing matters such as how videogames motivate players, and videogame interface design. See www.ictadvice.org.uk/gameonline or www.becta.org.uk/technology/software/curriculum/cge/index.html for more information. The event will run until the end of December.

Xbox publicity campaign gets rolling
Microsoft has announced that it is to sponsor Robbie Williams on his forthcoming European tour to promote the Xbox. The tour takes in eight countries and starts on June 28, 2003 in Edinburgh and demo pods will be provided at selected venues. German fans of the singer will even be treated to a special Robbie Williams DVD Pack that includes an Xbox DVD Controller and an exclusive DVD, which contains a special message from Robbie, plus exclusive unreleased tracks. More good news for Xbox is that sales of Xbox Live have got off to a positive start in the US, with all 150,000 starter kits selling out.

Sega and D3 announce new budget titles

To be this good takes AGES...

In a move sure to thrill those who like their gaming old, cheap and rose-tinted, Sega and budget pioneers D3 have announced the formation of a new company, 3D AGES, with the intention of reviving and refitting classic Sega titles for the PS2. D3, best known for its range of cheap PlayStation and PlayStation2 software (retailing at ¥1,500 (£8) and ¥2,000 (£10) respectively), will own 49 per cent of the company, with the rest belonging to Sega. Whether Sega's studios will have a hand in the games' development is unclear, but unlikely, and almost irrelevant; it's the return of some highly valued intellectual property which excites, and it seems 3D AGES isn't wasting any time, already issuing a list of forthcoming titles.

Four games have been given a release date of Summer 2003. The first is *Fantasy Zone*, initially seen on the Master System, and whose update may well be based on the *Space Harrier*-style version that was first set for release on the PC Engine. *Space Harrier* itself is also down for an early reappearance, with the arcade classic finally getting a true 3D engine, and a background generated randomly from fractals. The other two are *Phantasy Star*, which contains new characters and items, and now switches between 2D combat sequences and 3D exploration, and *Golden Axe*, which will be a true sequel to the '89 original.

After that, the schedule is less clear. It looks like *Monaco GP*, *Gain Ground*, *Bonanza Brothers*, and puzzler *Tant R* are the arcade brands heading for revival, while the Mega Drive's much-loved *Streets of Rage* also seems certain to return, along with Alex Kidd in *Miracle World*, last seen on the Master System. 3D AGES is also investigating the possibility of updates of *Virtua Racing*, *Phantasy Star II*, *Last Bronx*, and *Phantasy Star IV*. All games will retail at ¥2,500 (£13). No UK distribution deal has been announced, although Sega's recent declaration that it intends to relaunch as a publisher in parts of Europe may mean good news for gamers intent on treading old ground.









The new version of *Phantasy Star* contains new characters and items, switching between 2D combat and 3D exploration. *Golden Axe* and *Space Harrier* will also get updates

Science Museum hosts professional gaming tournament

Intel invites the UK's leading gaming clans to compete for £25,000



According to Intel, this is just the beginning for professional videogaming

The prospect of professional gaming came a step closer recently as London's Science Museum hosted the first round of the Intel Masters Gaming Championships on December 21. The event took place in the museum's Wellcome Wing, home to the computing exhibition, 'Digitopolis', and was open to the public, though the tournament proper was only open to official competitors. Event sponsor, Intel, invited some of the UK's top gaming teams to compete for the substantial sum of £25,000 under the watchful eye of presenter Chris Barrie, of 'Tomb Raider' fame.

"This tournament will be the main thrust of our strategy to push professional gaming in this country and to promote it as a spectator sport," stated **Nick Knupffer**, Intel's UK Gaming Program manager. "Intel's aim is to encourage the industry and to help it grow its own infrastructure including leagues, tournaments and rules."





Some of the games that were contested at the Science Museum included *Counter-Strike*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*, and *Fifa 2003*, with highlights of the competition being shown on the museum's massive IMAX cinema screens. So far, the biggest professional gaming event held in the UK was held by Games Domain in September, offering £20,000 in prize money, and it looks like next year could see more events and even more cash on offer.



***Counter-Strike* was one of the titles in the tournament at the Science Museum**

Crawfish closes doors

Slowing demand for Game Boy Advance software forces handheld specialist into liquidation

Difficult market conditions have forced Croydon-based developer, Crawfish Interactive to close. After being founded in 1995 the company quickly carved out a reputation as a specialist handheld developer, producing an impressive software CV that included such titles as *Ecks vs. Sever* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper*. However, the continued underperformance of the Game Boy Advance software sector, and the current climate of intense commercial competition across the industry as a whole, made the company's position untenable.

As a result of going into voluntary liquidation, the company's entire workforce was made redundant on November 14, and the company ceased development work. The move was announced by **Cameron Sheppard**, the company's managing director. "I'm deeply sorry to lose the team that we created at Crawfish," he said, commenting on the news. "We worked hard and everyone here was passionate about the games we made so I'm sure that their talents won't be wasted and they will all find good positions within the industry. I'm currently investigating the possibilities of finishing the games we had almost completed and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support in the past five and a half years and can honestly say that I am proud of what we achieved in that time."

Hard times

The announcement coincides with bad news for a number of publishers and developers, in spite of record software sales, and highlights the difficulties presented by an intensely competitive, hit-driven market. It's also underlines the downturn in the market for GBA software. Despite the company's forays into other handheld sectors, such as PDA and mobile phone gaming, the static demand for GBA games has prompted several publishers to refrain from commissioning new software. In addition, Sheppard argued that several late payments from publishers, no doubt themselves struggling, exacerbated the company's predicament.



Crawfish managing director, Cameron Sheppard announced news of the company's closure in November

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Pro Evolution Soccer 2	PS2	Konami	In-house	9
Dynasty Tactics	PS2	THQ	Koei	8
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	PS2	Rockstar Games	In-house (Rockstar North)	8
Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation Vs Zeon	PS2	Infogrames	Bandai	8
Mutant Storm	PC	www.pompom.org.uk	PomPom	8
Mystic Heroes	GC, PS2	THQ	Koei	7
Robotech: Battlecry	PS2, Xbox, GC	TDK Mediactive	Vicious Cycle	7
ToeJam & Earl III: Mission to Earth	Xbox	Sega	ToeJam & Earl Productions	7
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Xbox, PC	Ubi Soft	In-house	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	PS2, Xbox, GC	Activision	Neversoft	7
Contra: Shattered Soldier	PS2	Konami	In-house	6
Haven: Call of the King	PS2, Xbox, GC	Midway	Traveller's Tales	6
Reign of Fire	PS2, Xbox, GC	Bam Entertainment	Kuju Entertainment	6
The House of the Dead III	Xbox	Sega	Wow Entertainment	6
James Bond 007: NightFire	PC, Xbox, PS2, GC	Electronic Arts	Gearbox Software	4
MechAssault	Xbox	Microsoft	Day 1 Studios	4
Star Wars The Clone Wars	GC, PS2	LucasArts	Pandemic	4
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	PS2, GC, Xbox, PC	Vivendi Universal	Black Label Games	2



Mutant Storm



Dynasty Tactics



Pro Evolution Soccer 2

Mobile Suit Gundam

CUTTINGS



Vice sells

Although it comes as no surprise, given the massive levels of preorders for the title, Rockstar's *GTA: Vice City* has become the fastest ever selling game in the UK, having achieved sales of over 250,000 copies after just two days on sale. Meanwhile, proving that crime does indeed pay, the publisher was also buoyed by the fact that *Grand Theft Auto III* has become the first ever million selling videogame in the UK, having so far sold over 12m copies of the game worldwide.

More acquisition rumours

This month's rumours of activity on the acquisition front has been dominated by speculation that Microsoft is set to take a controlling stake in Sega. Although it's a move that's been proposed many times before, Bloomberg reported the rumour, revealing that shares in Sega consequently rose by 17 per cent. Spokesmen from both companies deny the rumours. Other rumoured acquisitions concern Activision and Eidos. Activision is known to have considered the possibility of acquiring Rare some time ago, and recently raised $500m (£318m) by issuing new shares, fueling conjecture that it is to hit the acquisition trail, with Eidos the rumoured recipient of its attention.

Namco orders alienbrain

Namco has announced that it is to adopt NXN's alienbrain software package for its Hometek division. Key development teams in the company's US consumer division are to be equipped with NXN alienbrain and NXN's Project Management Extension (PMX), to manage art assets and source code files during the development process. See www.nxn-software.com for more information about ordering an NXN alienbrain evaluation pack.

www.nvidia.co



GeForce takes the next step

Not just faster, nVidia's latest graphics technology GeForce FX allows developers to code smarter too





The demo uses time-dependent shaders to age the materials of a truck; the steel body rusts, while the chrome tarnishes and rubber perishes (top)

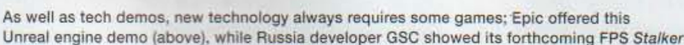


Another 12 months, another piece of high-tech silicon from nVidia. But while the GeForce FX (previously known as NV30) architecture comes trailing the usual marketing hyperbole – "We have applied rocket science to bring this product to market." – there is a feeling it marks a new qualitative level for PC graphics. Partly, this is because it's a much cleverer box of tricks when compared to the brute force rendering approaches of GeForces 1–4. These offered developers a fixed, if fast, graphics pipeline, whereas GeForce FX allows them to make their own decisions concerning how they use the hardware's power.

Ironically though, some of the other smarts come from one-time nVidia arch-rival 3dfx, the intellectual property of which nVidia acquired in 2000. Before it went bust, 3dfx focused on optical effects such as motion blur and depth of field, but neither the graphics technology nor the programming tools at the time were up to the job. nVidia has resurrected those ideas, however, incorporating them and ex-3dfx staff into its aggressive R&D schedule.

"There are two reasons why we call it FX," explains **Geoff Ballew**, nVidia's GeForce product manager. "One is because it's the first GPU created by the combined teams of what was formerly 3dfx and what is currently nVidia. The second is because it's about film-style special effects." Claiming GeForce FX delivers human emotion in a way that has not been possible before, Ballew says, "We call this marriage of stunning cinematic quality imagery with realtime graphics Cinematic Computing."





As well as tech demos, new technology always requires some games; Epic offered this Unreal engine demo (above), while Russia developer GSC showed its forthcoming FPS *Stalker*

Real slim shaders

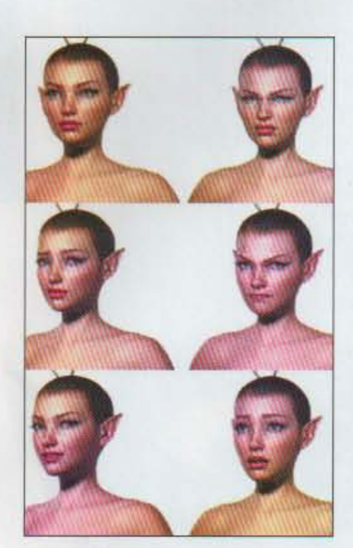
A key enabling technology behind the hardware is the implementation of Microsoft's DirectX 9 pixel and vertex shaders. These programming languages enable developers to gain low-level access to graphic card processors, providing lightning-fast performance. Of course, as an open standard, all graphics cards supporting DirectX 9 use this technology, though in a potentially dangerous precedent GeForce FX supports a non-standard extension, known as Version 2.0+ pixel and vertex shaders. A standard DirectX 9 graphics card supports merely Version 2.0 technology.

The difference is that GeForce FX enables developers to write longer shader programmes, though the longer the programme, the more processing time is required. "We prefer to let developers decide how to use the extra functionality as opposed to limiting their creativity," Ballew counters. He says nVidia's approach means developers can use techniques such as dynamic branching within their shaders, which is useful for animation blends.

Other elements of the technological armoury nVidia is bringing to bear with GeForce FX includes support from its shader programming language Cg (see **E**113) and the architecture's powerful CineFX graphics engine. This can handle eight pixels and 16 textures per cycle, double that of the nVidia's previously highest-performance part, the GeForce4 Ti 4600. In another DirectX 9 development, it supports 128bit colour precision per pixel, and the latest 8X AGP memory bus specification too. nVidia has also reworked its anti-aliasing technology, with a new optimised approach called Intellisample.

The result is a product that Ballew says offers 2.5 times the performance of last year's Ti 4600 model. Of course, the comparison that really matters will be how it shapes up relative to current arch-rival ATi's Radeon 9700, but for hardcore PC gamers with deep pockets, the future's looking faster and better than ever.





Named Dawn because nVidia says GeForce FX is the "dawn of cinematic computing," this pixie shows the power of shaders to animate materials such as skin and translucent wings

Building the perfect beast

In terms of hard figures, the GeForce FX chip contains 125m transistors, double that of the GeForce4 Ti 4600. It's also the first chip nVidia has designed to be manufactured using a 0.13 micron process and copper interconnects. The use of copper is important because it means, theoretically, that the chip uses 36 per cent less power than an equivalent example using aluminium, although GeForce FX will ship with a custom-designed thermal management system.

The move to 0.13 microns is significant too, as it means the chip can run at much higher clock speeds. The GeForce FX core is clocked at 500MHz and it will use 1GHz Samsung DDR2 memory. But all this comes at a cost. As a fabless semi-conductor company, nVidia sends its designs to partner TMSC to manufacture, then sells the chips to companies such as LeadTek and Gainward who incorporate them in graphics boards. Because of this, nVidia can't confirm pricing or availability, although it's expected that graphics cards based on the GeForce FX technology will be at retail by February, with pricepoints around the $500 (£323) mark.



www.gamespyarcade.com

From spy to king

After conquering PC gaming, technology company GameSpy is now focusing on getting console gamers online

Gaining the custom of the world's largest thirdparty publisher must be the ultimate red-letter day for any tools vendor. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that GameSpy is pretty happy with the announcement Electronic Arts has signed up for its online gaming technologies. Under the agreement, EA will incorporate GameSpy's online gaming middleware into future games. GameSpy will also provide assistance in managing the back-end services for EA's games with respect to servers, bandwidth and reporting support.

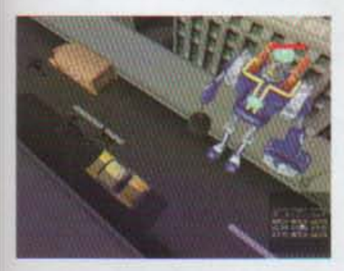
"Even companies with massive resources like EA want to make sure they devote their resources and energies to their core competency – making great games," explains GameSpy's CEO **Mark Surfas**. "Since we offer Electronic Arts and other publishers a proven, reliable, cost-effective solution for online gaming infrastructure, we're able to free them of the concerns of having to manage this infrastructure for many of their games."

The agreement is the culmination of previous work GameSpy has carried out with respect to EA's games such as *MoH: Allied Assault* and *Freedom Force* and rounds off a great year for the company. As well as EA, GameSpy also picked up business from Take2, Activision and Disney. Not bad for a service that, from a consumer point of view, merely offers online game matching and community services such as chat rooms and buddy lists.

"Let's be clear – there is a lot more to this area than simply running the game servers," Surfas points out sternly. "We're actually talking about the development and deployment of key online technologies – everything from anti-piracy systems to in-game voice chat." Indeed, GameSpy offers developers 14 toolkits which allow it to deal with issues such as matchmaking, community, administration, online competition networking development and patching issues. It owns the popular online voice communication technology Roger Wilco, too.



GameSpy was quick to support online gaming for consoles. Back in 2001, it hosted Activision's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* for PS2 and now offers support for GameCube titles



***Allied Assault* and *Freedom Force* were the first fruits of EA's link with GameSpy, but expect many more PC and console games**

Arcade haul

Yet for most consumers, GameSpy is best known for its Arcade software, downloads of which top the 8m mark. Weighing in at 5Mb, the client allows PC gamers to chose low-latency game servers, both narrow and broadband, for over 300 games. At peak times, the service hosts around 140,000 gamers simultaneously. It's a number that's bound to increase in 2003 as the game consoles come online.

Interestingly GameSpy was quick off the mark with PlayStation2, supporting online options for US players of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* back in 2001. "A large portion of our technology business will come from delivering PS2 solutions – we are the clear leader in this space," predicts Surfas, adding, "We also expect to see some business from the GameCube market – all 14 of our toolkits are available for it."

And while he says GameSpy's not permitted to discuss the company's involvement in forthcoming EA titles, he admits the agreement covers all the platforms that GameSpy supports – PC, PS2 and GameCube. Support for Xbox is a bit of a moot point though. Technically, it's not a problem but as Microsoft is setting up its centralised Live service, there's no official place for GameSpy. But having said that, the company does offer a hack service of sorts. Called GameSpy Tunnel Software, this allows Xbox gamers to play online for free using a manually set up LAN via the Xbox Link option.

"I applaud Microsoft for making a heavy investment in technology and infrastructure and giving online gaming the focus it deserves," says Surfas of Microsoft's decision to go for a centralised online gaming system. However, as he points out, there are wider commercial implications which may affect its overall success. "Publishers are always looking to maintain the best economies of development while providing the best user experience," he says. "The future we strive for at GameSpy is one where publishers can use our tools across all of the major platforms, developing once for three, four or more SKUs."



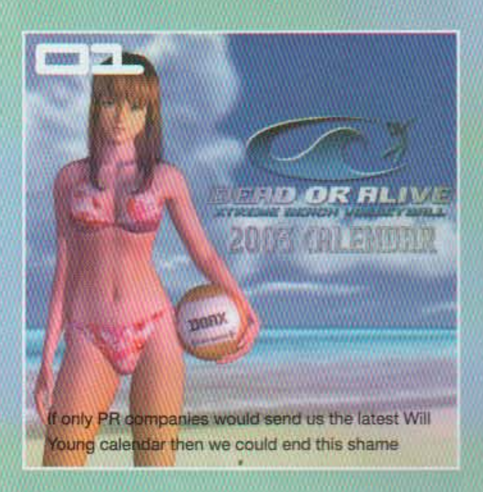




The consumers' view of GameSpy is its ubiquitous GameSpy Arcade utility which allows gamers to find fast servers, check patches, chat and maintain their buddy lists

OUT THERE

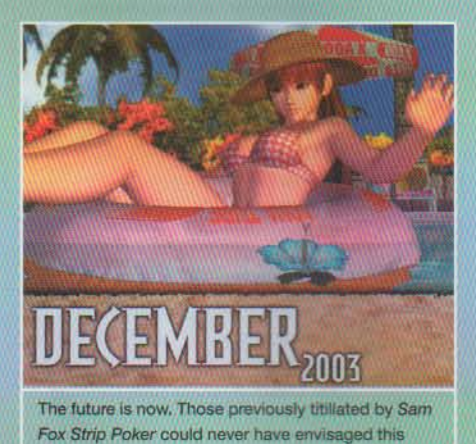
REPORTAGE



If only PR companies would send us the latest Will Young calendar then we could end this shame







The future is now. Those previously titillated by *Sam Fox Strip Poker* could never have envisaged this




Solar Action means that gamers will have to resort to using the GBA in bright conditions. Nghher

01 Seasonal titillation

UK: Edge has to wonder at the kind of nerd that would buy a 2003 calendar chock full of digital women posing provocatively to an imaginary camera. Helena reclining in an innertube, Christie sporting a ridiculous fishnet-style all-in-one and Tina crawling seductively, legs akimbo, across pixellated sand. It's childish, cynical and mildly sexist. However, it does seem to present accurately the year ahead in a handy quick reference format perfect for hanging on a wall or door. **Edge** will just have to make do until something less offensive to the eye comes through the post. Order your *DoA Xtreme Beach Volleyball* Calender from CA Games on 0141 334 3901.

02 Bright light! Bright light!

Japan: Hideo Kojima continues to break new ground, and no, you cynic, **Edge** isn't talking about even lengthier cut-scenes. His new vampire-based GBA game is being termed a "Solar Action RPG"; the game's title is *Bokura no Taiyo*, which means something along the lines of 'Our Sun', and the new genre tag comes from the sensor at the top of the cartridge, which alters the game according to the light level surrounding the player. But hasn't Nintendo harnessed the GBA's 'unique' screen capabilities to provide this sort of feature already? Witness *Castlevania*: when there isn't a light shining directly on the screen, many of the enemies are *completely invisible*. Catch up, Kojima-san.

Soundbytes

"Models graphics in realtime, so there's a greater choice than usual of angles from which to watch objects on the screen."
'Good Housekeeping's appraisal of the Xbox, as published in the 'Guardian's G2 supplement.

"He was like a caged animal – he looked like Blanka."
Radio 1's Sara Cox shows off her SF knowledge when describing Goldie's first few hours in the Celebrity Big Brother house.

"In the past year, however, games consoles have changed all that: they have processors, microchips, graphics and sound cards of their own"
'Good Housekeeping' explains why the PC isn't a dominant force in gaming anymore. Consoles were so much cooler when they were made from bits of string and discarded contraceptives.

"The court has no difficulty in presuming that the vast majority of these cards have been sold in Japan, rather than in the US."
A court rejects Uri Geller's claims that Nintendo turned him into "an evil, occult, Pokémon character". Psychic Pokémon Alakazam clutches spoons in his yellow claws and gives enemies headaches.

"Controller disliked by all testers: it clicks when used and looks flimsy."
'GH', again, this time on the GameCube.

Wheely odd

UK: And if Kojima's attempts to play around with handheld form and function weren't enough, accessory maker Pro Play has produced a steering wheel for the GBA. Now, it's certainly innovative – the GBA clips in behind the wheel, allowing the screen to be seen through the gap in the centre – but **Edge** can't help wondering if it's a little, well, unwieldy/inappropriate/pointless. "Someone has gone mental or seriously ill," reads a customer review on EBgames.com. Well, **Edge** wouldn't go that far, but it doesn't seem unreasonable to suggest that its true worth may well be limited to that of a historical curio. For more information visit the company's Website at www.proplay.co.uk

Animal attraction

UK: Oh, c'mon, people. Bit Charg is just so last year. If you're really down with the kids you're into Micropets, Tomy's 2002 shot at the electronic stocking filler market, and the smallest voice-recognition toys in the world. Micropets come from a distant world called Micronesia, and each has its own behaviour patterns and sound effects. Essentially, they're miniaturised Furbys, only much more easily crushed underfoot. A new set launches in January, including a new monster, a new dog, a pink pony, a panda and a hamster. Each Micropet costs £10 and should be available from toy stockists nationwide. More information at the Website www.micro-pets.com, or the Tomy Careline on 02380 662600.

"We're not there yet, are we?"

UK: Dolby UK recently drove down to Future in order to evangelise the benefit of surround sound (and to show off one of the most impressive in-car entertainment set-ups around). And despite being into home cinema (particularly for games) since the early '90s, **Edge** was left humbled by the remarkable quality of the soundstage. Once the Chrysler Voyager's soundproof doors were safely shut the system was allowed to stretch its watts: playing *Burnout 2* on the vehicle's PS2 in Pro Logic II on the biggest in-car LCD monitors money can buy was certainly a new experience. For that matter, so was watching a DVD in full Dolby Digital 5.1 or listening to the car's latest addition: a DVD-A deck.

Data Stream

Number of days it took *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* to sell 1m units: **40**
Number of days it took *Metroid Prime* to sell 250,000 units: **7**
Time since Samus Aran's last outing: **8 years**
Arcade *Defender*'s year of release: **1980**
Conceivable **Edge** rating: **10**
Jaguar *Defender 2000*'s year of release: **1996**
Actual **Edge** rating: **3**
PS2 *Defender*'s year of release: **2002**
Actual *Edge* rating: **3**
Estimated next appearance of *Defender*: **2008**
Predicted **Edge** rating: **3**
Amount lost to piracy by games, video and music businesses, according to FACT: **£2.358bn**
Percentage of ELSPA raids that reveal evidence of "other criminal activity including drug trafficking, pornography and even terrorism": **80**
Percentage of **Edge** staff concerned that raids on their houses might produce similar 'evidence': **100**

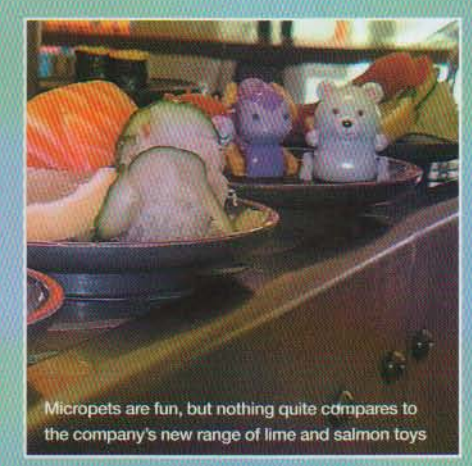




The Pro Play wheel peripheral means that gamers will have to tilt the GBA for best results. Nghher



The latest range of voice-recognition toys. Expect a banning order from schools across the nation



Micropets are fun, but nothing quite compares to the company's new range of lime and salmon toys



With the ICE taken care of, the time has come to lower the shoxs, fit some OZs, get some NOS...



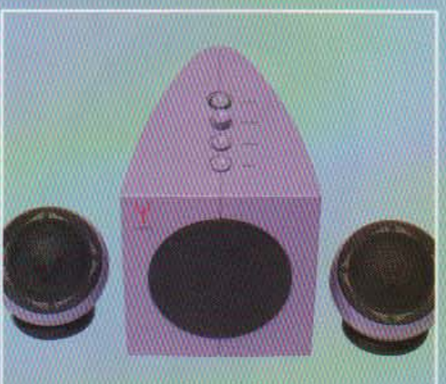




The TAG McLaren reference equipment stuffed in the back is probably worth more than the car



The Herao speakers come in a ribbed version for those who still appreciate the Athena things in life



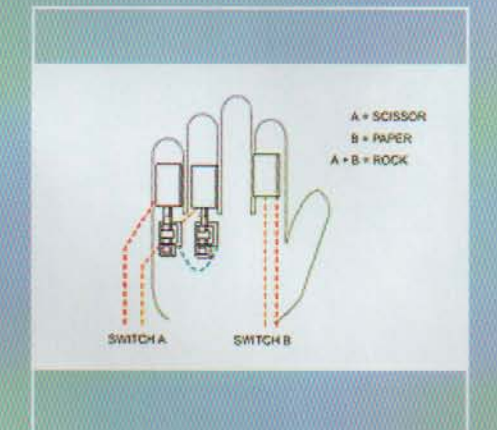
The GC 2.1 sound system is a quality product, but the lilac style may require a total room redecoration



But is there a cheat mode with **Edge**'s fourth way rule? Remember, kids, ROCK always wins



Not the most enticing peripheral, but much hilarity can be had from asking users to smell the glove







Is that a fag hanging outside the mouth of Mr Driller's rival or is he just a very modern man?

06 Chic-er-speakers

UK: See, most of the time it's great being a style-conscious GameCube owner, what with your pretty little console in your pretty little house, everything styled to match, like *Animal Crossin* but *for real*. Except there's the thorny issue of speakers; everyone knows that chromatically identical audio is in this year, but lilac speakers are rarer than rapid PAL conversions. Thank goodness for Herao, then, because its GC 2.1 speakers offer cute and quality sonics, styled to clone Nintendo's games machine/handbag. An Xbox and PS2 version is also available – but since when have those brutes cared about thematic matching? More information from www.herao.com

07 Scissors, paper, roxxor!!!

Eire: "*Bionic Roshambo*," states **Kieran Nolan**, proudly, "is the culmination of nearly four months of research into the symbolism of the hand as a link between humans and machines." It was also final-year project for his MA at the University of Limerick, namely to build a prototype arcade machine based on **Edge**'s favourite parlour game, Scissors, Paper, Rock. Offering "hand gesture recognition as an arcade gaming interface" (academically speaking), *Bionic Roshambo* comes with peripheral gloves which detect the shape you're throwing and displays the digital equivalent on screen. The end result? "An original approach to videogaming, and an engaging experience for users." And there's probably more strategy to it than *Super Smash Brothers*, too. More information at http://keyo.net/bionicroshambo/

08 Drilling me softly

Japan: True story: **Edge** is visiting Namco's headquarters with its French-Japanese correspondent, when a young woman skips through the room hugging a *Mr Driller* doll close to her chest. She smiles, stops for a brief chat, exchanges business cards, and the continues on her way. "Who was that?" **Edge** enquires. "Who?" says **Edge**'s man-in-Japan, with a Gallic shrug, "Oh, 'er. She created *Mr Driller*." Her plush friend turned out to be a prototype. A year later, and the toys are finally available, along with eight-inch models of Driller's rival and Driller's dog. No Susumu yet, though, or any sign of an accompanying five-foot games designer. Shame. More details from US importer http://ufocatcher.net

Continue

Old games made good
A fond welcome back to *Shinobi* and *Metroid*
Kevin Smith: Game Designer
Jen Saves Ben for Christmas No. 1
Microsoft's Christmas TV promos
It's getting its act together just in time

Quit

Old games made bad
Joust as the next victim of Midway's necrophilia?
Nintendo's Christmas TV promos
Metroid, *Zelda*, *Crystal Chronicles* and *Resi 0* are out next year, kids
'Faking It's Phil Deane
"An arrogant little twat"



MEDIA

09 Light

One of the warning signs of fiction is a train of authors falling over themselves to praise the new book from a returning seminal writer; cue praise from Iain Banks, Stephen Baxter, Alastair Reynolds and Michael Marshall Smith for M John Harrison's latest. Known for his 1975 'The Centauri Device', 'Light' is Harrison's first serious attempt at sci-fi for almost 20 years. And while Bank's view that 'Light' is "brilliant" seems overblown, less contention surrounds Stephen Baxter's view that it is a "viscerally intelligent" book.

As befits Harrison's reputation as a serious writer, 'Light' maps out a clever juggling act between three story strands: at the end of the 20th century Michael Kearney probes the nature of randomness via the tarot, a mystical set of die and research into the advanced programming of quantum code. Meanwhile, 400 years in the future, Seria Mau pilots her k-ship through 14 dimensions using the results of Kearney's work and washed-out thrillseeker Ed Chianese looks for his next trip. It's a mark of Harrison's skill, that while the denouement is protected until the final chapters, each strand occasionally nudges its fellows, ensuring 'Light' is always more than the sum of its parts. This is particularly true of the ending, which provides each character with a curtaincall, and brings overall completeness. The only criticism can be whether the effort taken to craft 'Light' measures up to its conclusion. For Harrison, at least, the journey appears to be more important than the final destination.

10 Web 3D

3D Web technology isn't an obvious candidate for the Laurence King coffee table treatment, but in conjunction with a book on 'Online Branding', the publisher obviously thinks the time is right for its new 'Design Online' series. 'T3's feature editor Dredge is a little more circumspect, noting in his introduction that Web 3D has been "the next big thing for more than five years now." It's not clear outside specialist areas, such as gaming or technical visualisation, that the third dimension brings much additional enjoyment to Internet users.

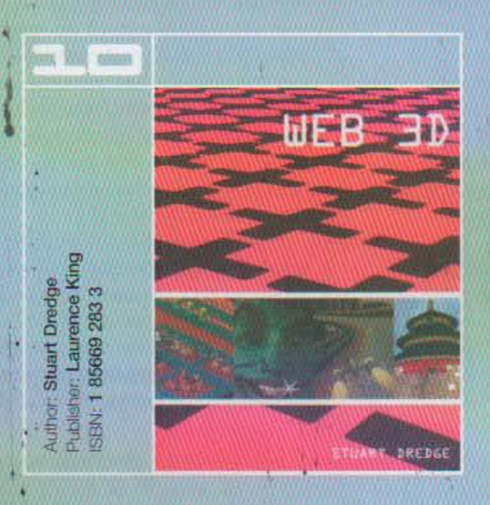
Partly it's an issue of bandwidth – something only now being addressed in the UK by the rollout of cheap broadband – but there's also there's the question of standardised authoring and playback software. Macromedia's Director and Adobe's Atmosphere packages were launched in 2001, and they provide a focus for some of the book's case studies. Both the Li Jin's Temple of Heaven and Ham On Rye's Dark City projects, for example, were winners of Adobe's Atmosphere demo competition.

Other areas Dredge considers include the different approaches taken by online communities such as Habbo Hotel, spacelounge and dubit. More interesting for **Edge** readers however, are the proprietary game engines from the likes of Wild Tangent, 3D Groove and Design Assembly, which take advantage of technologies such as hardware acceleration. Wild Tangent, in particular, seems to be blazing the trail, with more than 30m games played using its Web Driver in the past six months. Once again games are leading the way for 3D, but it still remains unclear how much further the technology will spread.

09

Author: **M John Harrison**
Publisher: **Victor Gollancz**
ISBN: **0 575 07026 9**

10



Author: **Stuart Dredge**
Publisher: **Laurence King**
ISBN: **1 85669 283 3**

11



Site: **Emogame**
URL: **www.emogame.com**

11 Website of the month

If the news that Kevin Smith has given Affleck and J-Lo a personalised scrolling beat 'em up (*Jen saves Ben*) leaves you cold, then this may be more suited to your taste. *Emogame* is a scrolling arcade adventure that takes you into the loveheart glitterstick tearstained world of Emo music, depicting several of its stars in sniffly pixels, including At The Drive In, The Get Up Kids, and Jimmy Eat World. Steven Tyler's there too, but not in a flattering way. **Edge** plays as the egotistical Conor from Bright Eyes; his Fevers and Mirrors special attack has a certain narcissistic resonance. Be aware, though, that parts of *Emogame* are exceptionally tasteless, and it's certainly not suitable for minors, even if they've just been dumped.

12 Advertainment

Japan: Microsoft has rethought its Xbox marketing approach in Sony's nation and come up with this: an advert geared towards a more adult audience.



A lady's back. A gentleman's hand. Grown men on tricycles. Generic techno in the background.



The couple embrace. The men race.



The men continue to race. They pass the couple.



Extreme racing. Extreme grimacing. Extreme techno.



Ahead of the pack, the leader grabs a mop, focuses on the corridor sprinkler system...



... well, you can guess the rest.



Male voiceover: "Play with style." Message: "Playing is art." Come back David Lynch, all is forgiven.

Evolution: when you scored that goal in the final minute of extra time – the slightest touch of the left analogue stick, a little acceleration with R1, a nudge of the square button so gentle it's as if you're afraid it might break. You know, when you scored *that* goal; when you replayed the moment the ball crossed the line back and forth, back and forth, the goalkeeper perpetually stretching, clawing, failing; when you left it static at that instant and panned the camera around, catching the whole pitch frozen in an instant of elation and despair; and when you zoomed in on the keeper's face, you swore you could see his heart breaking.

It's a funny old game, they say, again, and again, and again. *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* arrived on RedEye's doorstep this morning, and by all accounts it's pretty much the same as *Pro Evolution Soccer*. The kits are slightly different (gamers with an artistic bent can design their own), a few more animations, bit crisper, a new training mode, but yeah, pretty much the same. It's just enough to capture RedEye's ever-wandering eye for a couple of seasons with West Ham (because they're called 'Lake District', mostly, and RedEye fancies both the view from the terracing and the territorial advantage of playing at altitude), and then it gets filed with the original under M for 'multiplayer essential' or 'mostly redundant', depending on how you look at it.

The vehemence with which dedicated football game fans have vilified EA's *Fifa* series over the years is definitive. When magazines refer to iterative updates, they do it in the context of *Fifa*, and have been doing so since '96. The flagship franchise is visually unrecognisable from then, of course, but in terms of control it plays pretty much exactly the same. It is more arcade game than simulation, emphasising the spectacular over the workmanlike, the overhead kick over the unfortunate deflection. It is a very American interpretation of the sport; like watching the MLS actually, all technique, little heart. RedEye's yearly *Fifa* taste-test: is it possible run the length of the field with the keeper, head for a sweet spot, turn side on to the goal, and stroke it home with a ludicrously-curved shot? Congratulations, you've just bought an expansion pack.

Just like if you've bought *Pro Evolution Soccer 2*, then. It hurts, but there's no point playing sweetheart with it anymore, because Konami is going for the mainstream jugular. You bought the original – maybe you even bought *Winning Eleven* direct from Japan, such was your hardcore fervour – and you played evangelist. You told everyone you knew, bought a multitap, brought them round, won them round. You showed them why it was criminal that every year, every Christmas, *Fifa* sold so unbelievably well, and you made them promise to give *Pro Evolution* a chance. Konami pulled puppy-dog eyes, begged you to help; you played the virus, the sweetest, smartest virus, and now you've served your purpose, and you're dead to it.

Tears because the Dutch players are all called Oranges, because of Aragon (Manchester United), Andalucia (Lazio), or because the team data within the repainted shells is just so last year? Forget it. The publisher doesn't want to be your friend; it wants to be Electronic Arts. It is just as easily established that the general public don't like change as it is that big companies like money, and the big money comes with getting the general public on side. Result? The same game as last year, but with Queen on the soundtrack, lots of in-store promotion, overwhelmingly positive feedback from the specialist press, and an unparalleled underground word-of-mouth marketing campaign run by you. Congratulations. Write and tell Konami. It might send you a couple of *PES* car stickers.

Meanwhile, EA sees what's happening, and strikes back with a plan to regain credibility. Partly with the soundtrack, which substitutes the Robbie Williams anthems of old with (fractionally) more credible sounds from the hyper-produced Miss Dynamite-ee-ee, bright young things turned REM-wannabes Idlewild, and the teenage boy catch-all to end all catch-alls, Avril Lavigne. More pertinently, though, the game engine is ALL NEW, written in bold, and it might as well say, "SHIT FOLKS, WE'VE GOT A RIVAL FOR OUR LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY." Sensing that these days the kids are all about grit and determination, the ALL NEW engine contains a Simulation mode, which makes the game more subtle – fewer overhead kicks from the halfway line, essentially – and consequently makes *2003* a much better experience than *2002*. They're really trying. You can still beat the whole field with the keeper, like. But at least it's trying.

It's all too little too late, though. *PES2* thrashed *Fifa* in its the first week of PS2-only sales, and while the multiformat charts the following week show *Fifa*'s popularity continues on formats where it's essentially (currently) unrivalled, it appears EA will have to do some even more desperate repositioning to save its franchise from extinction. If it can't make the saving tackle, the route to goal is clear for its opponent: Konami will inevitably follow the clean, simple, business model so successfully imprinted by its predecessor. Which means, at the end of the day, Brian, that the football market will absolutely belong to it for the next few years; the evolutionary path of football videogames will stall for a while, and *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* will be the last version of the game RedEye will buy for a while.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Could Konami be a victim of its own success?

"Konami pulled puppy-dog eyes, begged you to help; you played the virus, and now you've served your purpose, and you're dead to it"

Sick as…? Hey, it's not all bad. If we step back and look at how the beautiful game's digital representation has evolved, from *Pong Football* to *Match Day* to *Kick Off* to *Sensible* to *Fifa* to *ISS* to now, if we stand on one of the peaks in the Lake District and check out the rolling vistas of the progression of football progression. Even though the little increments are so insubstantial, the wider picture shows just how far we've come, and how each reigning champion has refined the art of sporting entertainment just a little bit.

Ten years ago, the best football game was *Sensible World of Soccer*, which was entertaining, but nearer to pinball. And now? There are spins and tricks and volleys and jammy goals scored off a midfielder's arse, and things we couldn't even dream of before. And sure, there are still those loathesome sweet spots – much harder to find, but they're there – and yes, we know it's still nothing like the real thing, because it's impossible to compress every muscle in the body into a joypad. But the point is that it's closer, more fun. And that, my friends, is Evolution.

*RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s*

Cruising down the streets at sunset to the strains of Mister Mister's 'Take These Broken Wings', on my way to inflict seven types of ballistic mayhem in my mauve casual suit – it is clear that the decision to set *Vice City* in the mid-'80s was a stroke of genius. And one might begin to wonder why so many games are either set in some buffed-up sci-fi future or wrapped in a claustrophobic faux-medievalism, when the broad canvas of history offers so much that is unexplored in the way of mise en scène. Has the time come for the historical videogame to emerge as a viable sub-genre, to set alongside the historical novel and historical drama?

Vice City's historical fidelity is not, of course, faultless. For the purposes of useful communication, you are given a cellphone that seems to weigh down your character far less than a standard Motorola brick of the period would. And while I'm no Jeremy Clarkson-style automobile buff, I suspect that there would have been somewhat fewer SUVs on the road a decade and a half ago. However, the game's expertly judged soundtrack and costumes do work together to give it a distinct aesthetic character, which both cleverly plugs into the '80s nostalgia of the core 20–35-year-old customer demographic, and distinguishes it from all the other games on the shelves.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Videogames should look back (with a little less anger)

The grand arena for historical reconstruction in videogames remains, of course, WWII, and games such as *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* trade on their limited 'realism' (in terms of historically accurate weapons, uniforms and so on) as much on their gameplay qualities. At its best – for example *Allied Assault*'s extraordinary Normandy landing sequence – this approach can surpass both historical prose and film in its visceral immersion, in the sense it offers of witnessing historical events at first hand. It could well be true that those who play these games have a better sense of what it must have been like to fight in the war than anyone else save the veterans themselves. The charge, meanwhile, that such mass tragedy should not be reduced to the status of 'entertainment' will not stick as long as we sanction the existence of thousands of other artworks in different media – from Spielberg's film 'Saving Private Ryan' (a shockingly brutal 20-minute special-effects sequence followed by two hours of increasingly bug-eyed sentimentality) to Ian McEwan's novel 'Atonement' (in which the war is merely a convenient device to frustrate the central romance). And, of course, entertainment does not preclude learning, or other more ambivalent responses to a work.

At the other end of the spectrum is the ahistorical attitude to history. A game might be set in the foggy streets of 19th-century London, only to feature dayglo demons that must be dispatched with heavy weaponry, thus ignoring the restrictions of place and action that might actually result in something interesting and original. In games that set their historical net over a wider span, meanwhile, a particular period is often used merely as window-dressing to differentiate one level from the next, as evidenced in *TimeSplitters2*. Sure, you have a tommy gun in '20s Chicago, or an old-fashioned shotgun in Victor Hugo's Paris, but quite apart from the intrusive science-fiction elements, the consistently frenetic nature of the shoot-everything-that-moves gameplay tends to work against any real sense of period immersion.

And this example points up the major problem with any more sophisticated treatment of history in videogames, which is that our modes of interaction with gameworlds are, for the most part, still simplistically violent. If *Conflict: Desert Storm* were to be a truer account of the Gulf War, it would necessarily include hours of gametime huddled with your comrades against a tank, complaining about sandstorms and drinking endless cups of tea. And it is presumably the essentially static nature of much of the fighting in WWI that has prevented game designers from recreating it. There is not much stereotypical digital action to be had sitting in a trench and listening to shells boom overhead.

"Has the time come for the historical videogame to emerge as a viable sub-genre, to set alongside the historical novel and historical drama?"

Literature and film can build themselves around the stories of characters trapped in such situations, with the fighting itself often becoming an interlude, a means of punctuating the emotional drama. While videogames cannot find a viable alternative dynamic for such 'quiet' reconstruction, their choice of milieu will remain highly circumscribed. The most popular historical milieu in videogames after WWII is probably feudal Japan – and we all know that feudal Japan was about little more than samurai wandering around hacking each other to pieces with large swords, so that's all right.

Even adventure games that are not primarily defined by a violent dynamic are still heavily dependent on technologies of object interaction – in other words, gadgets. *Prisoner of War*, with its array of low-tech, period gadgets such as boot-polish, mirrors and slingshots, was a brave attempt to extend the possibilities of action in the historical videogame, which failed only because of its mysterious insistence on a tedious 'realtime' gimmick and frustratingly repetitive gameplay. But there are limits: it is clear that a game with such a huge and satisfying variety of gadgetry as *Ocarina of Time* could never be set in a naturalistic historical period. The further you go back in history, the fewer sorts of gadgets are available of the kind that would plug easily into the interaction templates of a modern videogame.

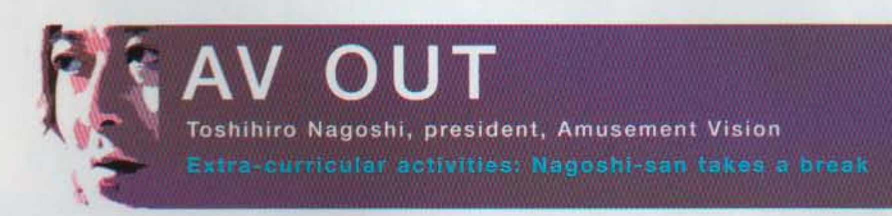
The freedom to combine any kind of gadget with any kind of environment explains why so many games are set in a vague future, but we are becoming saturated in familiarity with the sci-fi stereotypes of games such as *Red Faction II* or the woeful final levels of *Perfect Dark*. Such milieux are comfortable and predictable, and familiarity breeds contempt. In many ways the past is more alien than a weakly imagined future. A videogame equivalent of Patrick O'Brian's historical seafaring novels, or a game drenched in the religious paranoia of the Crusades, would surely be richer and stranger than yet another few miles of stainless-steel corridor and laser guns. It remains to be seen how such games might work, but it is surely an enticing prospect. For one sign of the maturity of an artform might be its ability to play not only with its own history (as Kojima's work does so spectacularly), but with the history of humanity as a whole.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Damn, I'm busy. Almost suicidally so. In fact, I just can't even find any time at all, so my position as an **Edge** contributor is going to have to end soon. Can I just say that I have really enjoyed my time doing this, and that I wish you all well.

No, I'm just kidding – I don't want to stop writing here. But, to be honest, I've felt that way this last month: "I'm so busy. What can I write for the column…?" But then my heart responds: "It is easy to give up. If you have to, let it be when you truly feel the limit." So, that's what I've decided, albeit slightly uncomfortably. I'm going to continue. Why? Well, let's just say I'm somewhat obstinate. If I'd given up, that would have meant I'd reached my limits. I mean, until now, I always refused to bring my work home, but now, not only at home but everywhere, I can't stop writing when something work-related crosses my mind. So, yes, I will carry on, obstinate as I am.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Extra-curricular activities: Nagoshi-san takes a break

But this time, since I had so much trouble thinking about what to write, I'd like to tell you about something completely different: a personal snapshot of what it's like to live in Japan, about my hobbies. I hope that you don't mind this; perhaps you might interested in what occupies my thoughts when I am not making games.

As an opening statement: to be honest, most of my salary disappears on alcohol and fashion. Don't I buy any games? Of course. But I get even more from my colleagues and friends in the industry. Meanwhile, I drink so much. No, really. I drink every single day.

In the past? Well, in my early 20s, I'd drink a bottle of bourbon one day and I'd do the same the next, without any problem. These days I can't do that so I just drink half a bottle of whisky. This is still quite a quantity. It may be that people from overseas won't understand. There is a big drinking culture in Japan, you see. Most of my closest friends and colleagues drink, and it's how we relax and unwind together.

Shochu (a light type of Japanese sake) is my regular drink at the moment. Joryuchu is another Japanese drink I really like as it offers an authentic Japanese flavour. It's made of rice and wheat, and has a very clear taste. You can drink it in various ways, but the best part is it has no effect on you the day after. Even after drinking more than one bottle of it I've had absolutely no effect the following day. It is truly a friendly type of alcohol. Still, as people will tell you, even friendly alcohol can be a poison if you drink too much of it, and for that reason I try to keep my intake at a reasonable level.

There are two types of alcohol I don't really like. First, beer. I can drink it, and I think I like its taste, but only the first bottle. I can't believe it when I see people neck bottle after bottle, and for that reason I always refuse to go to beer gardens or beer halls.

The second type is wine. I know it's quite tasty, and I do like it, but I'm very vulnerable to it. Twice I've been completely drunk with absolutely no recall of the event, and twice it was because of wine. I drink it, but only in moderation. Oh, and it is very expensive, too, which makes things worse: if you make me drink really expensive wine it will be pointless, because in the morning I won't remember. My body has no expensive needs.

Having said that, though, another passion of mine is fashion, and I really love Gucci at the moment but it is quite expensive so I can't afford to buy it very too often. Why do I like it so much? Simple. Because it's cool. Oh, and I really admire the brand's current creative director, Tom Ford. Gucci used to be an outdated brand, but with Tom Ford, it's found a new sense, a new style. He is quite a businessman.

"In my early 20s, I'd drink a bottle of bourbon one day and I'd do the same the next. These days I can't do that so I just drink half a bottle of whisky"

One of my favourite Gucci products is the shirt. I really recommend any of you who haven't yet tried one to do it. No, I don't have any shares in the company, and (obviously) I don't work for them, but that's what I felt when I put my first Gucci shirt on: "This is how my body should look." I believe the shirts show off the best of me, and I love this brand for that. Most of my suits are Gucci, too, although Gucci did not make me discover the value of brands. Until I felt in love with Gucci's house style I was already wearing a local brand named Comme des Garcons, but I realised I felt stronger for Gucci. Believe me, it is a real pleasure to discover your perfect style – but the best part is that I not only found the perfect suit, but also the person who was in charge of finding me the perfect suit – my future wife. We met in that shop and married not long afterwards.

Anyway, I don't only wear brands. I also like old clothes. They're endless. I love the fact that you cherish clothing like treasure, regardless of its age. I particularly love jeans. That began when I bought some Levi 201s, ten years ago in a vintage clothes shop. I'll save you from my detailed stories about my vintage jeans, but I have a special souvenir for every pair I've bought. Among them there is a pair of Levi 501s XX (war model) which has a special place in my heart. And my pocket, too – you could almost buy a small car with the same money. Anyway, I don't only have expensive ones – I also have standard pairs, in all sorts of colours. In total, I have around 50 and I only wear five of them.

I have one more fashion vice – silver accessories. It's quite a strong hobby. Again, I like most of the brands, but particularly Gabor of Kamhout, formerly ChromeHearts. Like jeans, my target market is wide, from the smallest domestic brands to the biggest massmarket items. My collection's too big to count, easily more than a hundred separate pieces. When I was younger I used to have necklaces, but now I only wear rings and bracelets, and I don't wear too many of them. Incidentally, my wedding ring is from ChromeHearts.

These accessories are so important to me since they allow several versions of me to make an appearance. I think it is important for creative people to develop their other interests. Anyway, next month I'll be back to talking about videogames! See you!

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Hey there. This is Lupin Kojima from the newly renamed 'Famitsu Wave DVD', formerly 'Game Wave DVD'. I've just sat down and read the November issue of 'Weekly Famitsu'. I don't know if you're familiar with 'Famitsu': it is the biggest videogame-related publication produced in Japan. Now, out of all of its many pages, for me, the most important part of the magazine lies at the beginning, and it's the 'Scoop' section. As a core reader of 'Weekly Famitsu' – you might have noticed my devotion to games, and 'Famitsu' readers are devoted, or the 'hardcore' – I always read these pages first, so I can learn about things long before they are released. That beautiful blend of text, screenshots, illustrations… ah, that is the very essence of Japanese videogame magazines. And these days, of course, I enjoy producing the magazine as well as reading it.





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, assistant chief editor, 'Famitsu Wave DVD'

Could Nintendo's *Metroid* games mark a new gaming era?

Anyway, the article in the November issue that I really wanted to read first was, unsurprisingly, in the Scoop section. It was a piece on *Metroid Fusion*, the Game Boy Advance continuation of the *Metroid* series, scheduled for a February 2003 release in Japan. (I don't know why it has been released overseas first; that's just how it is.) I know this may surprise you, but I wasn't interested in the GameCube version, *Metroid Prime*, but the handheld version! Of course, there were three pages about the three-dimensional console episode too, but my heart and my mind were entirely focused on the natural follow-up to the Super Famicom edition.

First, I'll mention what I'm expecting from both *Metroid* titles. On GameCube, *Metroid Prime* is a 3D action shooting game – essentially a firstperson shooter. On the Game Boy, it's a vertical and horizontal scrolling 2D action shooting game with a lot of emphasis on exploration and discovering new abilities – very orthodox, very retro.

The developer behind the GameCube version is an American company called Retro Studios, whose development problems you may have heard about (I understand that there was a lot of input from Nintendo of Japan, but it is a fundamentally non-Japanese title). The Game Boy Advance version was handled by Nintendo itself, in Kyoto, and it's worth stressing that the producer in charge of that version is one Mr Sakamoto Yoshio. He's the man previously responsible for, among other things, *Metroid* on the Famicom's Disk System (on which he worked with the late, great Gumpei Yokoi, who developed the original Game Boy, Robotic Operating Buddy, Virtual Boy and many other innovations at Nintendo). Yes: the man who lies right at the origin of *Metroid* has returned to ensure the quality of the revival, which makes me even more anticipant. Looking at *Metroid* on the GameCube, I think the difference is clear. They're two different games, two perspectives on the same subject, aimed at two different markets: Japan and overseas.

This may sound a little too much like a skewed kind of personal opinion, but I don't think the GameCube version of *Metroid* will sell very well in Japan. Perhaps you think this will have an impact on sales of the GBA version, but I'd like to recall my previous point: the difference between the markets in Japan and overseas.

In the previous issue of **Edge**, I wrote about Microsoft's Xbox console and, among other things, its undisputed leading title, the action shooter *Halo*. This game did so well worldwide, but by that I mean overseas, essentially, because it did so little over here in Japan. Of course, it is a quality game, no doubt about it. It brought link-up gaming to the console market, the sort of thing that console-owning *Quake* and *Doom* players, the firstperson shooter hardcore, had dreamed of for years. They were more than satisfied – but there aren't many of those sort of people in Japan, and that's just one reason why the game wasn't very popular. *Doom*, *Quake*, *Halo*: the firstperson shooter simply isn't exciting to the Japanese. You probably know this already – in previous generations of hardware, a variety of those action shooting games came from PC to PlayStation and of course the Saturn, but had absolutely no impact in Japan. Why was this? Partially because of the motion-sickness aspect; the genre appears to provoke a nauseous reaction in many Japanese gamers. I have tried playing many firstperson shooters and, to be honest, I always experience an amount of motion sickness myself. So, despite trying to get into it, and of course appreciating that it brings joy to many players, I cannot say that I really like the genre.

However, *Metroid Fusion* is completely different. When the average Japanese 'Famitsu' reader is asked "What games did you play as a child?" or "What games did you grow up with?" then *Metroid* is an obvious answer and a powerful influence. *Metroid*'s success in Japan isn't dependent just on that, but also on natural expectations that people have about the idea of a version of the old game. Those expectations are based on theoretical principles, such as "an academic action game," or "a return to pure fun," and they're magnified by the memories of people like me, who enjoyed the game many years ago on the Famicom Disk System. We're adults now – an entire generation who grew up with *Super Mario Bros* – and we have real memories and real hopes.

"If the facility works, not just in linking the GBA and GameCube but also in linking the US and Japan, *Metroid* could be a worldwide hit"

In the November issue of 'Weekly Famitsu', it was revealed that the GameCube's *Metroid Prime* and the Game Boy Advance's *Metroid Fusion* will feature some kind of synergy using the GBA link cable which connects the two pieces of hardware.

If the cable succeeds, not just in linking the GBA and GameCube versions but also in making the link between the widely different US and Japanese game markets, then *Metroid* could become the worldwide blockbuster that it might well deserve to be. Regardless of whether you like or hate either type of game, it looks like both will provide what *Metroid*'s always excelled at: fun. So I'm off to buy some medication against motion sickness, and count the days until February!

Lupin Kojima is the assistant chief editor of 'Famitsu Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Legend of Zelda: Winds of Takuto

After the last *Zelda* game Shigeru Miyamoto reckoned we wouldn't see Link until 2003. Here's a rarity: a game released (oh so slightly) ahead of expectations.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic

The disappointment of *Bounty Hunter* has only increased our appetite for the game that we're dearly hoping will save LucasArts' reputation from ruin.



(Xbox, PC) LucasArts

Ape Escape 2

The original *Ape Escape* made simians fashionable before *Super Monkey Ball* was even a glint in Nagoshi-san's eye. **Edge** is readying its net.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Ninja Gaiden

After playing the rather good *Shinobi*, **Edge** is dusting off its shurikens and getting ready to meld into the shadows with Tecmo's take on the ninja genre.



(Xbox) Tecmo

Risky business

Take a chance if you want the returns

"In a market that has become prosaic with character dependent games and sequels, Production Studio 4 would like to take this opportunity to announce five new and exciting games for the GameCube." And so Capcom, a company often derided for producing successive release schedules dominated by sequels, has declared its intention to risk its reputation and commercial position on a series of untested franchises. Granted, *Biohazard 4* is included in the company's announcement, but *Dead Phoenix*, *Killer 7*, *P.N.03*, and *Viewtiful Joe* (see **E**118), are all wholly original properties.

This model, of reinvesting the profits generated by popular franchises in the development of new titles that dare to take creative risks in the hope of creating further popular franchises, is surely an obvious one. Yet it would seem that there are far too few publishers – certainly in the west – willing to take any sort of creative risk in the current commercial climate, characterised as it is by intense competition. On a recent visit to Japan, a presentation by CESA revealed that the rising costs of videogame development are forcing Japanese developers, like their western counterparts, to pursue retail success in other territories.

Nevertheless, this year's Tokyo Game Show showed a refreshing determination on the part of Japanese developers to confront difficult market conditions by experimenting with new ideas. Unlike their western counterparts, who have responded to a difficult market by entrenchment and conservatism, Japanese developers continue to invest in new IP that may yet prove to be the lifeblood of the industry in the future. Capcom's decision to bombard the GameCube with totally new titles is a case in point. It's slightly ironic that the western publisher that comes closest to this reinvestment business model is the oft-derided Electronic Arts – though it's a shame the company's willingness to create new franchises isn't always matched by development excellence.

Sequels and licences are not, per se, a crippling problem for the videogame industry – *Shinobi* and *Metroid Prime* (both reviewed this issue) should be enough to prove that. But over-reliance on existing properties at the expense of creating new ones is. More publishers need to follow Capcom's admirable example, taking short-term risks to fund the long-term growth of the medium and with it, the company's profits.



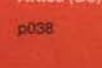


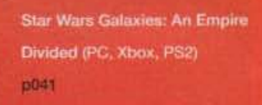




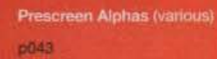












Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

It's the most anticipated (and controversial) Nintendo game for years, but will mainstream gamers accept Miyamoto-san's hard cel?







Nintendo had a translator to guide guests through the more incomprehensible moments, and while trial and error will get you through, **Edge** wouldn't recommend it, not least because you'll be missing out on a story Nintendo promises will be translated with some delicacy

T is the season to be jolly, or go on jollys if you'd prefer, because the pre-Christmas chest-beating from the industry's biggest publishers brings PR events thick and fast. Microsoft's Xbox Loft – a lavish apartment on the bank of the Thames filled with new games – arrived first, followed by Sony's typically brash bash in London Bridge, held to celebrate 3m UK PS2 sales. But it was Nintendo's understated party in a small venue in Shepherd's Bush that **Edge** was really anticipating, because early entrants would be gifted the first proper chance to play on *Zelda*.

Three hours of play later, and **Edge** feels qualified to give an initial, cursory impression of NCL's cel-shaded wonder. It is lush. That will be enough for most, and anything past this point is potential spoiler material, so consider that a warning before you read on.

Edge's experience began in a dungeon. Escaping appears to be a tutorial in Link's basic moves – climbing (push against a surface), jumping (press A when you get near a ledge), stealth (hide inside a barrel and sneak past guards), and combat (pick up a stick, and use A to hit and B to throw). Noticing a slim ledge to edge along leads Link to his first sword; a cut-scene follows, and the tiny adventurer finds himself cast into the ocean by a giant bird, right next to an island and a talking boat which lacks a sail.

So begins the first, simple, task – to fix the boat. A nearby Eskimo has a sail he'll sell for 80 rupees, and **Edge** would have completed this quest with swift aplomb, but – without sounding *particularly* bitter about this – a lack of prudence from another journalist led to Link taking on the persona of a ten-year-old gambling addict, and blowing all his cash on repeated games of 'Battleships' with a dodgy merchant. Still, thank goodness for perseverance, and regenerating urns full of five-rupee coins; soon the sail was reattached, nearby islands were within reach, and the initial linearity exploded.

Several hours in lie the hook-shot (whi attaches to items that spark when you poi at them) and the boomerang (now "super-powerful" and apparently able to attack multiple enemies, though **Edge** never managed it). Another toy making itself available early on is the leaf. Used on the ground, Link bats it like a fan, which sends blast of wind about ten metres in front of h and can be used to hurt enemies or manipulate objects. Used in the air, he hol above his head like a parachute, allowing to glide gently between distant platforms. **Edge** tested all these in a plant-themed locale, which also allowed for much grass slashing and some excellent Z-lock (now L lock) combat with a variety of enemies.

Problems? Link's analogue control appeared to be slightly twitchy – it appear be more sensitive than Mario's, for examp and manoeuvring on some of the higher platforms, when a long drop leaves you w so much more to lose, was a little terrifyin

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **December (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**112, **E**118















Control is similar to the N64 incarnations, with actions assigned to the face buttons, and L substituting for the Z-lock. The C-stick controls Link's wand, which can manipulate the wind

ome of the retry mechanisms and restart oints seem quite brutal, particularly in the st section **Edge** played – get caught by the ames and Link doesn't have a chance to scape, he's just automatically sent back to e beginning. And importers who can't read ana will have problems, as the game's redictably) heavily text-based, much more than *Sunshine*.

But the main problem that **Edge** can see the general public perception of the title; amers who have a rudimentary view of the lationship between visuals and maturity will e misled, and will miss out. Even now, with l'd-out Link proving as sumptuous to ntrol as he is to look at, the more the ening wore on the more partygoers walked by to the *Nightfire* and *Medal of Honor* emo pods. They say if enough people elieve something then it's true, in which case elda's for kids and lots of adults won't look ice at it, let alone get involved. But u know what? That's their loss.

Biohazard 4

Format: GameCu
Publisher: Capco
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Japa
Release: 20

Amidst lightgun spin-offs, online versions and redesigned classics for new platforms, Shinji Mikami finally returns with another true – and truly exciting – Biohazard sequel





Biohazard 4 is the first in the series to go for a free camera system. Predictably, little compromise has been made in detail. In fact, the locales look more expansive and involving than ever before. Environment design appears to mix the gothic with the stark post-industrial. Leon's sheepskin-lined coat is very 'in' right now

In a flamboyant style becoming typical of Capcom, the company chose to reveal its five forthcoming GameCube titles not at some dull hotel conference centre, but at Velfarre, the hottest club in Tokyo's decadent Roppongi district. Here, Shinji Mikami, typifying the attitude at his department, put on a wacky presentation of what will surely prove a key GameCube release, *Biohazard 4*. Having already impressed GC owners with *Biohazard 0*, he had the crowd in his hand, despite actually revealing very little about the game.

The major revelation was that, for the first time, a *Biohazard* title would be fully 3D (*Code: Veronica* still offered preset cameras). While the early locations shown did not quite match the sheer detail of previous outings, it' clear Mikami-san is going for the richness an beauty we'd usually associate with painted backgrounds, using the GC's raw power to update to 3D. This should mean a much mor flexible camera system, with players able to control this aspect themselves. This would require a rethink to the whole *Biohazard* game-style: until now, the series has relied or its use of horror film angles to create tension. It might also mean, at last, a change to the 'awkward' control system.

Attendant game press and industry insiders also discovered that the game features Leon S Kennedy from *Biohazard 2*, now looking older and, of course, more intricately modelled. His maturity reflects the ambience of the game. *Biohazard* seems to be moving away from its splatter flick roots. Indeed, there were rumours that Mikami-san and his team would be introducing a firstperson shooting mode, doing away with the vagaries of thirdperson aiming. An interesting prospect.

Biohazard 4 has not had the smoothest c routes to development. It was originally being designed by Kamiya Hideki and was set to take place on a boat, but then Hideki-san left in favour of *Devil May Cry*. Now Sato Hiroshi is directing, with Mikami-san fulfilling a management role. It's an important title – for GC, still struggling to make a dent on the monopoly enjoyed by PS2 and therefore failing to attract big-name support, and for Capcom, keen to keep *Biohazard* at the forefront of a crowded genre. No one has managed to create such a compelling scenario, though, and with Leon penetrating right to the heart of Umbrella in this adventur Capcom doesn't have much to fear. Unlike the rest of us playing the games.

Dead Phoenix

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer 2003**

The director of Code: Veronica returns, wielding not a survival horror sequel, but a strange Panzer Dragoon-style shooter. What are they putting in the water at Capcom?

Doubtless, the most important project to be revealed at Capcom's recent GameCube shindig was *Biohazard 4*. And with such a heavyweight videogame hogging the copious dance floor of Velfarre, it's no wonder that the latest work by Hiroshi Kato – the director of *Code: Veronica* – should be overlooked by many. That and the fact that *Dead Phoenix* is still very early in development.

Even with such a basic visual demo, there were definite signs of something interesting here, if only because Kato-san made such a spectacular and engagingly humorous presentation. The most convenient description that most attendees were able to come up with for the game was *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* meets *Shin Sangokumusou 2* (*Dynasty Warriors 3*). And that's an accurate summary.

The lead character is one of the last of a race of birdmen, hunted to near extinction by a determined enemy. To save his people from eradication, the winged hero has to engage in flight combat against a massive army. The control system allows totally free flight movement within a 3D environment, although some stages are limited to form a *Panzer Dragoon*-style path. Attached to his right hand the character has a large gun, which is capable of firing various projectile types. There's also a charge feature, which allows you to build up energy and let loose a devastating blast in the form of a fiery dragon.

The *Dynasty Warriors* element can be found in the allied birdmen who fight alongside you. These can be called to help out when you're being out-gunned, or deployed to form strategic, squad-based attacks. In the demo, these extra soldiers were running along the ground beneath, but in the finished game they should join you in the air as well, making for some dramatic three-dimensional battles.

Currently, little else is known about the project. It's clearly a radical new direction for Kato-san, and for the Capcom viewing public. The title drew little attention at the event, though – as mentioned – the early demo did the project little justice. The visuals will need to be spruced up but the idea of mass 3D conflict is an intriguing one. At the same time, the image of hundreds of birdmen engaged in mid-air combat reminded **Edge** of Brian Blessed and his hawkmen in Mike Hodges' 1980 version of 'Flash Gordon'. It is unlikely, however, that this is where Kato-san took his inspiration.









Team-based flight combat is an interesting hybrid, and from the looks of *Dead Phoenix* – especially the formation flying on the left – it has plenty of potential. The 'Fire' gauge in the bottom left of the screen can be powered up through the game and used to unleash a massively powerful blast. Judging by some of the giant enemies (above), you'll need it

Killer 7

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Grasshopper Manufacture**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November 2003**

Capcom's teenage infatuation with cel-shading is spreading to its thirdparty developers if this stylish assassination horror is anything to go by

Only one of the five games present at Capcom's Tokyo GameCube event was a thirdparty project. It also happened to be the most obscure and interesting – and considering it was alongside a birdman flight combat game and the 2D superhero adventure named *Viewtiful Joe* (see **E**118), that's a significant achievement. Developer Grasshopper Manufacture caught the eye of Capcom execs with offbeat titles such as *Moonlight Syndrome*, *Silver Deka* and *Hana To Taiyo To Ame To*, so producer Suda Goichi and his team were invited to write a title for the publisher.

Seemingly not tempted to water down its rather singular game design vision for the mainstream, Grasshopper came up with *Killer 7*, a gory adult shoot 'em up starring a crippled, but deadly assassin named Harman Smith with seven personalities and his sworn enemy Kun Lan, some kind of behind-the-scenes governmental power broker. The action seems to take place in 2D and features adventure elements interspersed with separate shooting sequences. Visuals are heavily stylised anime – not super-deformed, but cool and almost monochrome. At times during the demo it's hard to make out what's going on, everything merging into greys, blacks and whites. **Edge** wonders how this will evolve to allow for game mechanics as well as graphical effect.

As with the rest of the titles revealed in Roppongi, gameplay details are sketchy at best. Capcom's press material talks of a frenzied rivalry between the two killers, spanning five stories and four interconnected worlds. What is clear, is that there will be plenty of visceral detail. The demo shows gun battles accompanied by showers of blood, splattering walls and even the lead characters' clothes: another clear reference to darker anime. Which leads **Edge** to suspect that Grasshopper has a purely domestic market in mind for this title. Offbeat adventures, heavy in Japanese animation cut-scenes, have not traditionally fared well in the west. A trip to your local importer could be looming.







Just how far can a videogame intrude into high-end anime territory? *Killer 7* seems to be taking the envelope and shoving it far into the distance, using bleakly expressionistic colouring and overtly stylised characters. Interesting, but is there a game in there?



P.N.03

Format: GameCu
Publisher: Capco
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Jap
Release: Spring 20

The creative duo behind the original Biohazard returns with a fast-paced shooter, where slavering zombies are abandoned for rampaging mechs



Although he's overseeing all five of Capcom's forthcoming GameCube titles in a general manager role, Shinji Mikami is taking a particular interest in this thirdperson shooter. Acting as director and bringing aboard Kobayashi Hiroyuki as producer, he's reforming the team that unleashed *Biohazard* – and with it the whole survival horror tsunami – upon an unsuspecting world. But unlike the occasionally ponderous, puzzle-strewn gameplay of his zombie opus, *P.N.03* (which simply stands for Product Number 03) represents a return to a core gaming concep relentless shooting.

The plot is a kind of mech version of 'Aliens'. On a distant colonial outpost, an omniscient HAL-style automated defence system goes insane unleashing its security bots on the unwary population. Mercenary Vanessa Z Schneider is sent in to destroy the droids with a variety of powerful laser weapons. Although a non-stop shoot-fest is clearly the objective here, the lead character has been imbued with a range of defensive moves, allowing her to dodge incoming fire o hide behind objects for a moment's respite from the tech slaughter.

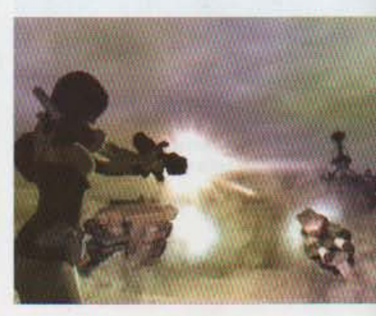
Both the mech and location designs are exceptional, making use of stark whites and shiny metallics which contrast heavily with th darkness of the *Biohazard* series. Some of th robot designs resemble Industrial Light and Magic's work on the 'Star Wars' prequels, with machines taking on a segmented insectoid look. There were whispered concerns about the simplicity of the lead character – both in terms of her repertoire o moves, and her design, but **Edge** likes the clean lines, and the fact that Vanessa's suit resembles a slightly more slinky Imperial Stormtrooper outfit. As with *Devil May Cry*, *P.N.03* could well turn out to be a victory of style and sheer fun over substance. Sometimes, that is enough.







The stark, monochrome corridors of 'THX 1138' inhabited by Stormtroopers? Is this Capcom's homage to George Lucas? The presence of mechs would suggest more local influences



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Raven Shield

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **Redstorm Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **February 2003 (PC), TBC (Xbox)**
Previously in **E**112

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail, said Benjamin Franklin. Useful advice for anyone playing Ubi Soft's latest plan 'em up

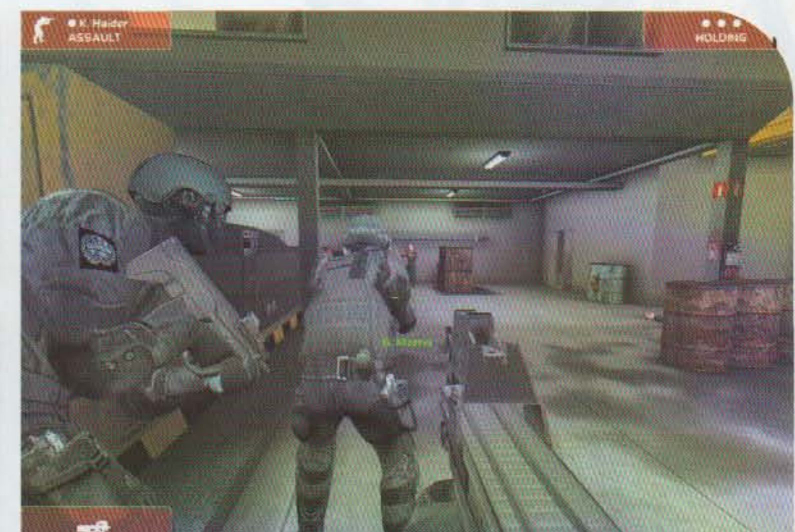
However significant Tom Clancy's contribution to either literature or cinema, it's fair to say that by throwing his hat into the videogame ring, he has finally contributed something worthwhile to the sum of humanity. While *Splinter Cell* and its charismatic lone hero demonstrate the great man's strength in depth, the more cerebral *Rainbow Six* is the original Clancy franchise and, despite a few sloppy console conversions, the one that's done most to enhance his reputation in videogame circles. And after its first appearance at this year's E3, hopes were high that *Raven Shield* would preserve the high standards set by the series so far. Thankfully, a recent demo appears to confirm those positive impressions.

Like its predecessors, *Raven Shield* tempers a drive towards authenticity with an admirable level of accessibility, and as ever, the planning stages of missions are vital. The new demo, consisting mainly of a mission to recapture an occupied oil refinery, offers an opportunity to get a better glimpse of the planning section – which is, after all, one of the game's core strengths and selling points. It's essential to equip your squad with an appropriate payload (from an almost overwhelming choice – see Use of weapons), and pay heed to your tactical advisers. So far, so familiar, but there's also a rather natty miniature 3D walkthrough of environments to complement the straightforward overhead map on which decisions are taken before missions are played out.

When the action does start, it's satisfyingly authentic. One-hit kills are now supplemented by an easy interface to allow squad commands, as well as the ability to gently nudge open doors. And though we highlighted the flash bangs in our last look at *Raven Shield*, the point deserves reiterating; the simulated disorientation is one of the best effects seen in a game for a while, combining aural and visual noise with control confusion. And thanks to effective use of the Unreal engine, it's all presented with crisp, cutting-edge visuals. Weapons dropped by enemies still can't be picked up, but as the developer points out, highly trained specialists would hardly stop to pick up unknown weaponry in the midst of an operation. Certainly it's not enough to diminish enjoyment of the demo.

Finally, it's worth noting that the game's 15 singleplayer missions are complemented by six dedicated multiplayer maps, with online matchmaking supported via the publisher's ubi.com service.



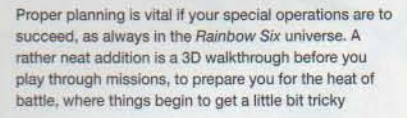






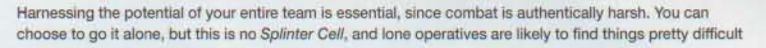






Proper planning is vital if your special operations are to succeed, as always in the *Rainbow Six* universe. A rather neat addition is a 3D walkthrough before you play through missions, to prepare you for the heat of battle, where things begin to get a little bit tricky





Harnessing the potential of your entire team is essential, since combat is authentically harsh. You can choose to go it alone, but this is no *Splinter Cell*, and lone operatives are likely to find things pretty difficult

Use of weapons

Fans of previous *Rainbow Six* titles have something of a reputation for their attention to detail. So they will no doubt be pleased to discover that there are a total of 57 weapons in the game, including the following new additions:

- Mac-11/9 Machine Pistol
- Micro-Uzi Machine Pistol
- SR-2 Machine Pistol
- MTAR-21 Bullpup Submachine-gun
- USAS-12 Automatic Shotgun
- TAR-21 Bullpup Assault Rifle
- Type 95 Bullpup Assault Rifle
- VSS Vintorez Silenced Sniper Rifle
- 23E Light Machine-gun

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Sony Online Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Summer 2003 (PC), TBC (PS2, Xbox)**

Previously in **E**112

With the last batch of utterly awful LucasArts games out of the way, could it be that the 'Star Wars' licence is about to strike back?

Other than perhaps the epic *Halo*-imitating shooter *PlanetSide*, there seems to be very little to get excited about in the intimidating world of massively multiplayer PC gaming. There's an enormous number of dubiously named titles, but very little style or zeitgeist cool to draw in the punters. The number of Sword & Sorcery clones is now rather depressing to behold. It's unsurprising then that the focus of so much attention has been lavished on *EverQuest* creator SOE and its attempt to recreate the 'Stars Wars' universe and to populate it with real people in the sumptuous *Star Wars Galaxies*.

Disappointingly, the rumour that players would be able to set fire to Wookiees and Ewoks proved to be entirely vacuous, but there is enough confirmed content coming out of Web-space to ensure that excitement is growing among the faithful. As a participant in this huge multiplayer world you are able to play as any of eight familiar humanoid races from the 'Star Wars' milieu, purchase an R2 unit and even construct your own light sabre. Clearly, enabling your gameworld avatar to become a Jedi Knight will be the ambition of most players and as a result such an undertaking will be extremely difficult. And it won't focus exclusively on the combat-heavy quests that provide a staple for the traditional fantasy RPGs, in *Galaxies* peacetime roleplaying activities are rewarded too.

However, in combat your adversaries include, AT-ATs, Rancor monsters and even other players, choosing as you do between Rebel and Empire forces. The game is set in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the first Death Star, although it's unclear just how quickly time will progress or whether gametime will run the same course as the films.

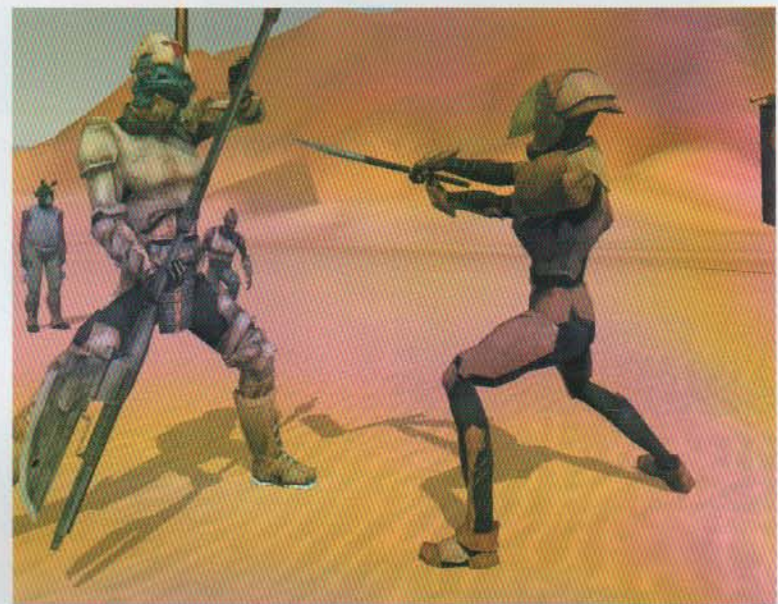
What has been confirmed, however, is that all the major characters from the films are present in the game and so you can expect to brush shoulders with the Skywalkers and others, possibly controlled by employees of Sony Online Entertainment. **Edge** suspects that someone's childhood fantasies are going to be realised in a most profound way.



Sadly it looks like simply throwing a rock to trap this blighter in the portcullis is going to prove a bit tricky when he's outside in his natural environment. No world on the Sarlacc yet either. We can but hope

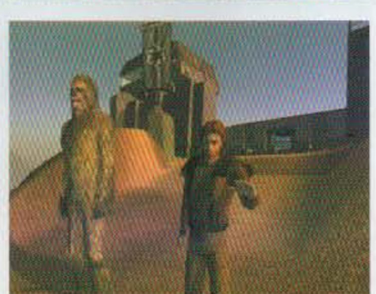












Going somewhere solo?

For the time being you won't be able to pilot your own starships in *Star Wars Galaxies* and intergalactic travel will be handled via shuttles, starships and a period of waiting while you move between worlds. However, SOE has not ruled out including a starship-based add-on at a later date and, if the core *Galaxies* is a success, such expansions and add-ons will be inevitable. Deep space X-Wing battles have even been mooted.

Impossible Creatures

Format: P
Publisher: Microso
Developer: Rel
Origin: U
Release: Janua

Microsoft looks to genetically engineer a new RTS franchise, and the tank rush appears to be dead: long live the hippo-with-a-dolphin's-head rush







Attacks are assigned to different parts of the body, so giving a creature a chameleon's head will allow it to attack from distance with an astonishingly long tongue (while a body part is useful for camouflage)









Wolves hunt in packs so any creature composed of part wolf gains an attack bonus when it's in the vicinity of three of its colleagues. The same goes for other species, too; the trick is to find a combination of two whose special abilities prove particularly potent when mixed together

ICU

In order to encourage the mod community to welcome *Impossible Creatures*, Relic invited some of the world's top mod-makers to a two-day intensive course in the game's editing tools. The suite of programs, which is available for free download on Relic's Website, lets amateur coders do much more to *IC* than just change the creature models. Indeed, there's a creature racing game already in the works, as well as one mod that enables gladiatorial single creature battles with the player given direct control of their hybrid pet.



Pharmacy, Damien Hirst's drug-themed restaurant in Notting Hill, isn't the most obvious place to show off your latest PC RTS. But Microsoft's marketing budget sneers in the face of the cheap and obvious and it has high hopes for Relic's genetically engineered fantasy. There i no doubt that *Impossible Creatures* will be a franchise, and given Microsoft's muscle in the PC market, it would be a surprise if it wasn't hugely successful. Which isn't a slight on the game at all; **Edge** arrived at the demo expecting little, and left pleasantly surprised.

Taking place in the Crazy World of Science Gone Mad – capitals demanded, because the game is coated with lashings of sci-fi hyperbole common to its '50s setting – *Impossible Creatures* entrusts the player with creating an army of biologically enhanced crossbreeds and playing them off, RTS-style, against the CPU or human opponents. The actual battles contain little that seasoned strategy fans won't have seen already; there are resources to be tapped, bases to be buil fog of war to be uncovered and an active pause which lets you queue up all these things and more at once. Competent, for sure, but it's the Crazy Science bit which *Impossible Creatures* uses as its selling poin

The game comes with a library of 50 real world creatures – apes, chameleons, rhinos, locusts, frogs, bats, sharks and so on – each with its own statistics and special abilities. The body of every creature consists of five sections, and in a beautifully simple mix 'n' match laboratory the sections of two differen creatures can be seamlessly interwoven, producing a new unit with abilities dependen on the sections you're using. Combining the body of a cheetah with the head of a hawk produces a quick unit with excellent sight, good for scouting. Blending a bat's midsection with a monkey gives a flying ape, capable of bombing rocks on enemies.

There are a phenomenal number of potential crossbreeds, some more useful tha others. It's hoped that players will create thei own unique armies, find strategies that initial seem unbeatable, but are quickly counteracted with newly crossbred squads and so on. Balance will be the key, naturally, and while the number of possibilities mean Relic isn't sure there's not an 'ultimate' unit, the game's undergone an almost unprecedented level of playtesting to ensure it's as delicately weighted as possible. That's the thing about being rich: you can afford to invest time as well as money.

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Deus Ex Invisible War

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Ion Storm

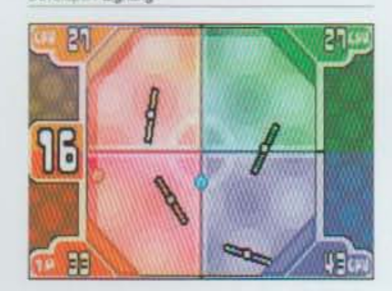


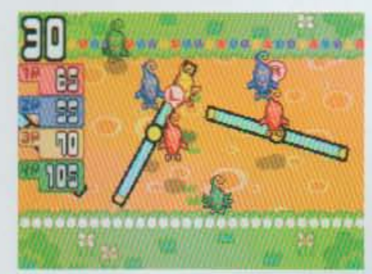


A name change and a couple of new screens is all Ion Storm is letting out of the bag at this stage. However, sources who've seen the latest code have returned extremely impressed

Kururin Paradise

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Eighting





Out in Japan by the time you read this, the premise of this sequel to the original likeable stick puzzler is identical, though a fourplayer link-up option for mini-games has been added

Time Crisis 3

Format: Arcade
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house





Running on System 246, Namco's shooter introduces new graphical effects such as smoke to make enemy location harder. Also you can now switch freely between (collected) weapons

World War II: RTS

Format: PC
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: 1C Company

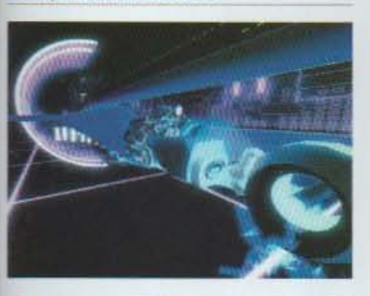




Over 100 historically-influenced missions, superior attention to detail and a graphics engine to match from the Russian team responsible for *IL-2 Sturmovik*. Due spring 2004

Tron 2.0

Format: PC
Publisher: Disney Interactive
Developer: Monolith Productions



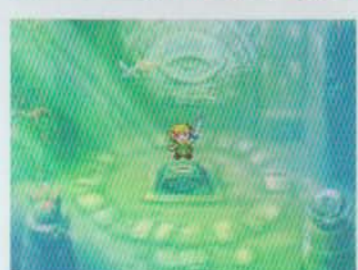


Taking all the popular elements from the Disney film *Tron 2.0* is beautifully abstract and a delight to behold. But though the lightbike sections are brilliant the adventuring remains a little clunky

Legend of Zelda: Four Swords

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house





Hopefully the imminent arrival of *Winds of Takuto* won't overshadow this other end of year must-have which offers the fabulous *A Link to the Past* and a bonus new fourplayer adventure

1080° Snowboarding: Avalanche

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house (NST)





The latest shots of Nintendo's update of Edge's once-favourite snowboarding title are reassuring but it's going to have to work hard in order to out-trick *Amped*. Now expected in April (US)

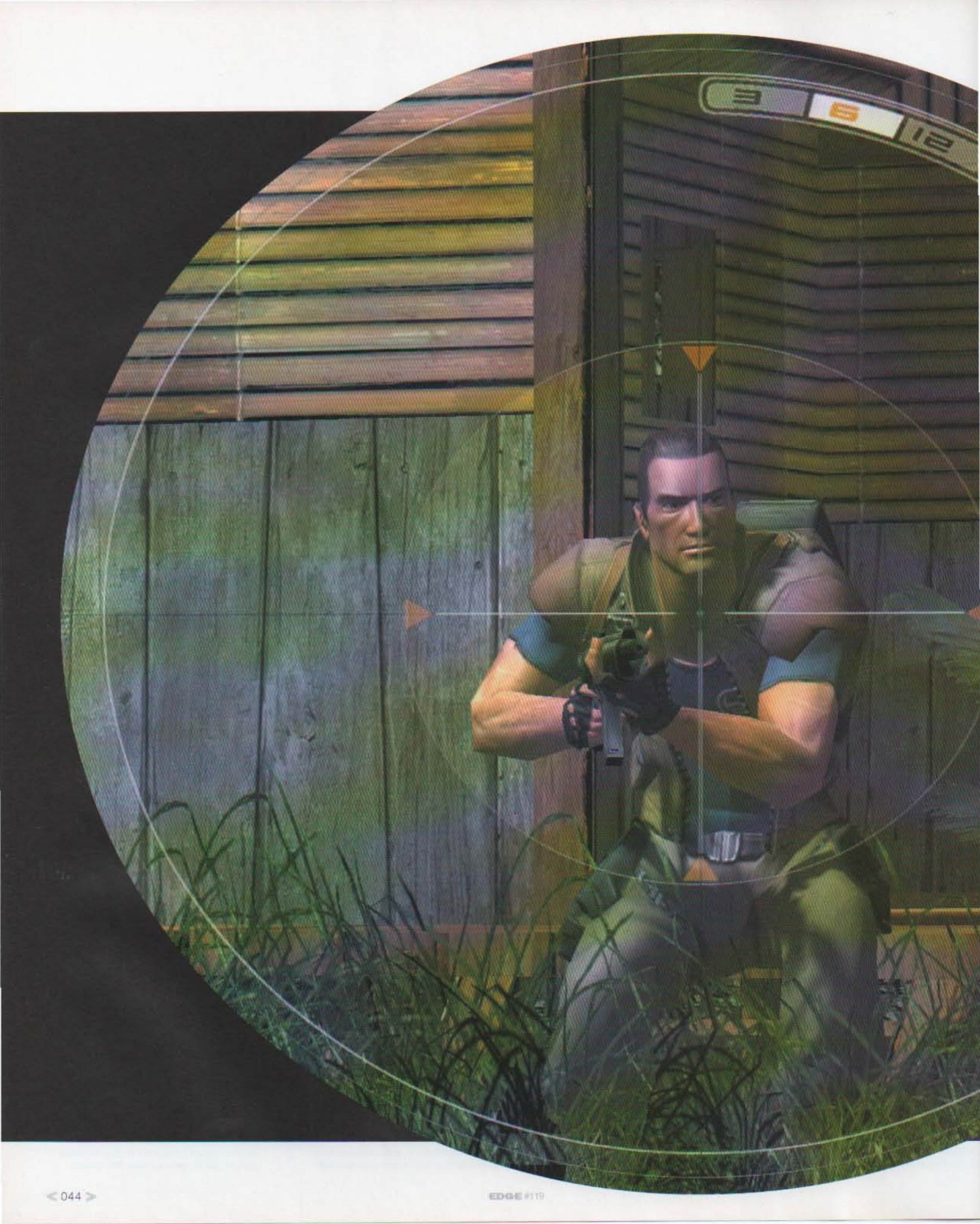
Grand Prix Challenge

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: In-house (Infogrames Studios Asia)





Genre-leading gameplay, excellent AI, unrivalled visuals and beautiful presentation... hardly surprising given it's from the Melbourne House team behind the great *Le Mans* (DC version)


3
6
12



Far Cry

A startling revelation: a firstperson shooter coming out of Germany that doesn't put us to sleep. Edge talks action bubbles, sagacious AI and rag doll physics with Crytek's multinational team

Just another FPS. It's a tag that Crytek has been battling against since *Far Cry* (né *X-Isle*, see **E**112) was conceived. Impressively, it only takes one brief look at this German developed game to realise that it is doing something very important. Play through one of *Far Cry*'s levels and that importance becomes more apparent still.

The firstperson shooter may be the most publisher-friendly genre at the moment, but a fallout is already beginning to occur. Franky, the majority of FPSs are boring and the public are becoming wise to this. "The industry just can't support any more firstperson shooters," agrees **Christopher Natsuume**, *Far Cry*'s producer, somewhat ironically. "We had to begin from a different perspective. There's always a gun, a health bar and a bunch of enemies, but that's no excuse for designing yet another tedious game. We knew there was a new way of doing an FPS and making the gameplay different."

Crytek's solution was to develop an experience that puts spontaneity before scripting and freedom before linearity. But stop there. These claims have been made before by nearly every developer of an FPS. So why should we believe Crytek, when so many other developers have failed to deliver in the past? Well, partly because **Edge** has already been in the thick of a *Far Cry* firefight, and can testify to the refreshing intelligence of the enemy forces. But mostly, because the technology that *Far Cry* is built on is stunning.

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **Crytek**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **Q3 2003**





Far Cry takes place on a number of islands and Crytek is actively playing on the juxtaposition of the idyllic with the horrific. Although details are scarce, expect some survival horror elements

"We don't care where the player goes, or what he does," continues Natsuume. "We give him a wide path – a beech or a cliff or a bay, but then he can do whatever he wants with the space and the tools provided. The technology has been developed so the player cannot break the AI. If it's physically possible for the player to do it, we say, let them do it."

Each enemy is propelled by sophisticated AI routines, and because they can actually 'perceive' objects in the game universe, they can react to them with alarming perspicacity. What's more, it actually works. It works because the AI code is fully integrated with the engine code. These are not just scripted AI routines bolted on to an impressive looking game.





Lighting, shadows, particle effects and textures promise much. A good deal of the action takes place outdoors and there are dramatic weather effects to enhance the sense of claustrophobia

"The engine makes it possible for you to 'play' with the AI," enthuses Natsuume. "If you restart the level five feet to the right, the effect will be very different. We've approached the AI as if it were a toy you can interact with. Enemies initially have anchor points, but there are several of these. One guy may decide to go and take a piss by a tree, then he may wander over to check an engine on a car. But when all hell breaks loose you will really see the diversity of behaviour. Nobody is scripted to go and use the mounted machine gun, for instance."

An early level saw **Edge** struggling to dispatch a group of commandos in



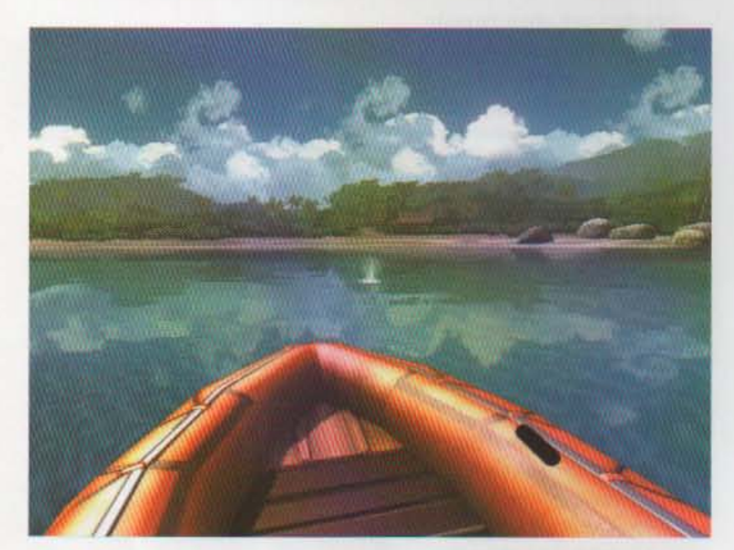


an overgrown area. Hiding behind a tree and picking off foes simply didn't work. Flanking manoeuvres ensured that our first experience with *Far Cry* was a short one. Second time? A little better. Moving from tree to tree made the enemy's advances a little less sure-footed. After taking a few soldiers down with automatic fire, one remained. Feeling more confident **Edge** charged towards the forlorn figure, but he displayed a healthy respect for his own self preservation. A half-tense, half-comical chase around a tree ensued, ending with **Edge**'s demise. It did, however, prove conclusively that the game's AI is refreshingly instinctive.

"Of course, we have picked apart the AI in many other games," says studio producer, **Jeff Yu**. "In fact, there's not much to pick apart. In *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* it's very predictable. Everything operates with scripted routines. This is fine the first time you encounter a scenario, but the second time? You begin to lose the sense of involvement." Designer, **Tony Davis** concurs. "We love *Halo*, and the AI works well in cover situations. The Covenant move effectively from one object to another, but they are not actually aware of each other. A subtle AI comes alive when you play it over an hour. The more you play it, the better it gets." **Edge** can testify that the AI in *Far Cry* is already alive. It's frightening when you consider Crytek still has eight months of development before alpha.

Anchors away

Remember the classic scene in *Half-Life* when marines abseil down from helicopter gunships? *Far Cry* features a pastiche of this moment, but it's noticeably more dynamic. After being taken into the editor Yu demonstrates how the 'anchor' points work. After killing key opponents, survivors will call for support. The gunship will then appear and bring in extra troops, anchoring itself to a location that's dependent on many factors – the player's location, the number of troops killed and where most of the action



You are able to hop into a number of craft in the game, extending the sense of freedom available. The firstperson perspective doesn't alter and you can still fire weapons while driving





These sketches hint at things to come. Biological experiments conducted by a shadowy organisation? Expect some freaks coming out of the woodwork, then

has occurred, etc. Incidentally, the abseiling troops can be taken out as they plunge towards the ground, or the gunship can be blown out of the sky. And as in *Halo*, the wreckage is more than capable of landing on your position.

Vehicles will be a big part of the *Far Cry* experience. Jeeps, rafts and buggies were shown to **Edge** but more are promised. The vehicles are fully integrated into the world and can be accommodated when approached. It is even possible to drive some of them one-handed while shooting through the windscreen with the other. All vehicle action takes place from a firstperson perspective, rather than from behind, as in *Halo*.

This tool box philosophy extends to every area of the game. Pick up a rocket launcher and it can deform the landscape to a devastating degree. Sure, only the areas and objects specified by the engine can be destroyed or deformed, but already it feels more dynamic than Geo-Mod. In *Far Cry* you *can* blow a hole in the ground and use it for cover. When bullets hit surfaces you see chips flying off all around. Wood chips for trees, metal chips from vehicles and stone chips from rocks. It's a detail that heightens the fear especially when bullets are zinging around your head.

Some great reward

Far Cry's sense of realism and attention to detail is focused solely on gameplay reward. The sniper rifle, for instance, was originally implemented so that there was a delay between the shot and the impact, you also had to take distance into account and aim higher than the target. "But that just wasn't fun," says Natsuume. "We found that this irritated the player rather than adding to their sense of immersion." In a similar way, enemy bodies can still be hit and affected when dead. Crytek felt the gore of *Soldier of Fortune* didn't add to the gameplay. Instead, impressive rag doll physics were added. Bodies jerk, slump and fly though the air with tremendous authenticity. As sick as it sounds, there's much fun to be had from seeing how the bodies contort under fire from different weapons.

Natsuume then challenges **Edge** to think of a memorable moment from any previous FPS game. **Edge** goes for the beach assault in *Halo*. "Absolutely. That's one of the best sections of that game," Natsuume enthuses. "What we've decided to do is build *Far Cry* around the concept of action bubbles. Each of these bubbles provides five minutes, or so,

"When all hell breaks loose you will really see the diversity of behaviour. Nobody is scripted to go and use the mounted machine gun, for instance"

Along with the jungle locations depicted, you will also get to explore a temple, a rusted battleship, Japanese bunkers, caves and the headquarters of the enemy – deep beneath a fiery volcano







"What we've decided to do is build Far Cry around the concept of action bubbles. Each of these bubbles provides five minutes, or so, of intense action"



of intense action. We said we wanted 200 things in the game to make it great. There are 14 levels and there are between seven and 15 action bubbles in each level. But we are also very aware of pacing. At the beginning of a game people want intense action to draw them in, and at the end there will be fewer, shorter action bubbles because we've found that people generally get eight or ten hours into a game and then they just want to finish it. The beauty of *Far Cry* is that the AI gives it a great deal of replayability for those who want to go back and try it on a harder setting."

Natsuume espouses his game design philosophy with such conviction that it's difficult not to be swept away in the enthusiasm. But with few 'action bubbles' actually on show it's too early to say whether the principle will work. Good action scenarios, such as the beach landing in *Halo*, don't come along very often. And the essence of action is inherent in the execution rather than the theory. What is certain is that the imaginations of the team will very much be on trial.

Going commando

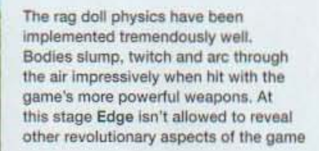
You also get the impression that *Far Cry* doesn't take itself too seriously. The action is the gung-ho stuff you'd find in a 'Commando' comic book. The hero, Jack Carver, operates a boat service to a series of islands in an archipelago but his blissful existence is interrupted when a giant patrol boat destroys his livelihood. The plot involves a Bond-style organisation that operates from beneath a volcano, biological terrors and a female photographer friend of Carver's who goes missing while investigating the corporation's nefarious activities. Cliché or parody – the choice is yours, but thankfully, cut-scenes are kept to a minimum to let the player get on with having fun.

However, *Far Cry* has every chance of success if only because of the muscular engine that underpins everything. Touted as CryENGINE at E3, Natsuume refers to it during **Edge**'s visit as the 'What You See Is What You Play' engine. It is remarkable. Want to see how the addition of a new vehicle will affect the gameplay? Just click a couple of buttons and the item is added to the gameworld. And the effect can be tested instantly. The same applies to any object, enemies or values that need to be altered or added. The landscape can be deformed, textures applied and AI updated within minutes, if not seconds. Crytek boasts that the designers can build a level in just one evening.

"How long does it take to go from a good idea to a game in most editors?" asks Natsuume rhetorically.

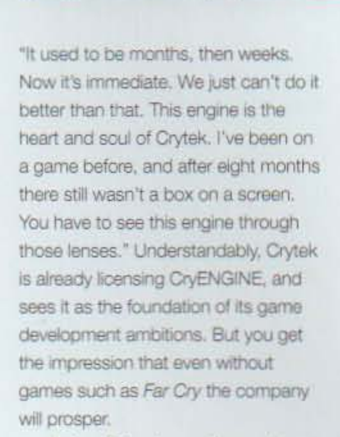






The rag doll physics have been implemented tremendously well. Bodies slump, twitch and arc through the air impressively when hit with the game's more powerful weapons. At this stage **Edge** isn't allowed to reveal other revolutionary aspects of the game









Polygon power

One of the more impressive aspects of CryENGINE is its ability to generate incredibly detailed objects with minimum polygon and processing expenditure. Typically, the character models in the game are made up of a only 15,000 polys. A sophisticated texturing and blending technique is then used, overlaying the model with detail adding a sense of depth to the framework. The difference is clearly noticeable in the example below.



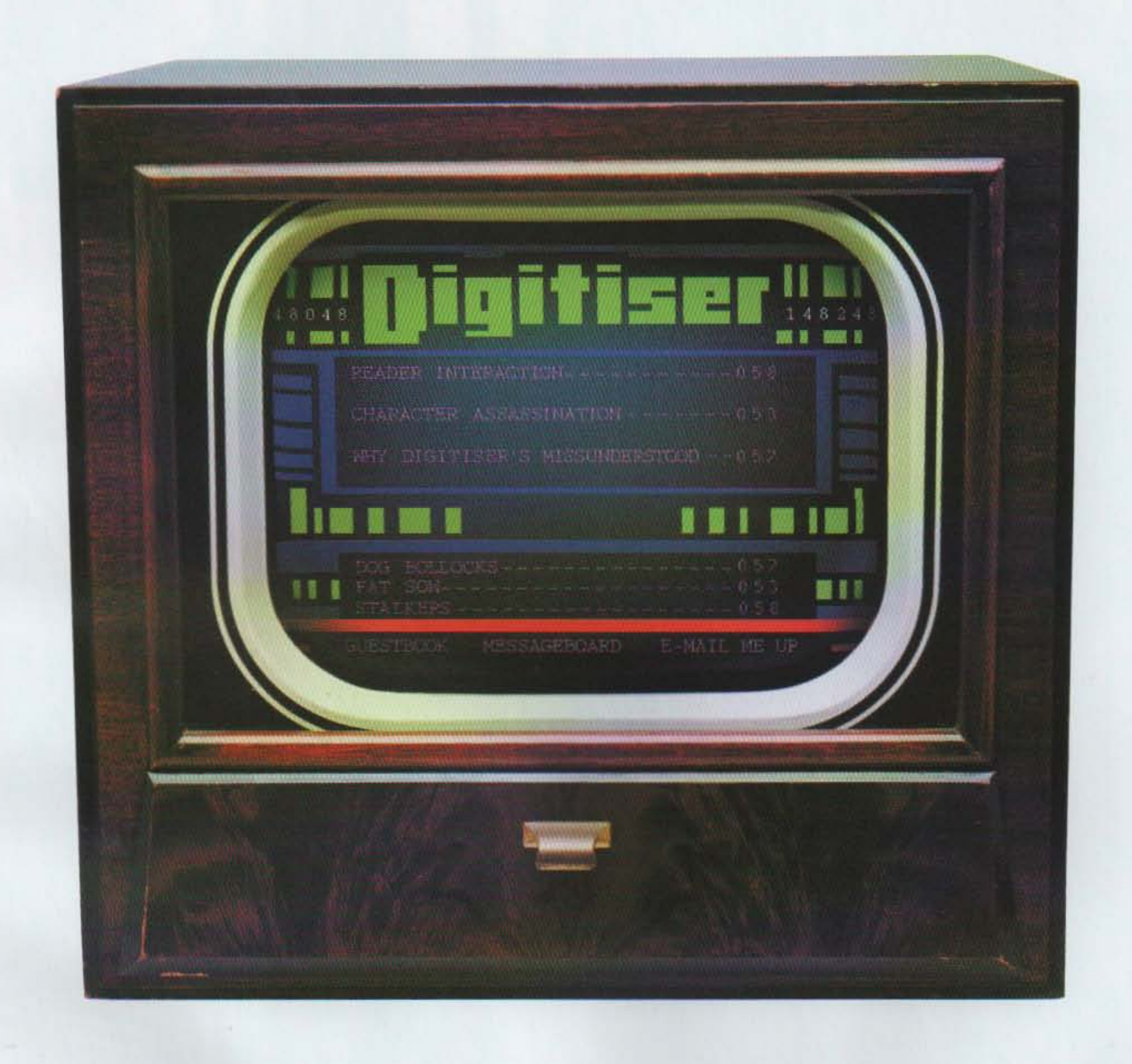


"It used to be months, then weeks. Now it's immediate. We just can't do it better than that. This engine is the heart and soul of Crytek. I've been on a game before, and after eight months there still wasn't a box on a screen. You have to see this engine through those lenses." Understandably, Crytek is already licensing CryENGINE, and sees it as the foundation of its game development ambitions. But you get the impression that even without games such as *Far Cry* the company will prosper.

Before **Edge** leaves the quaint German city of Coburg, Natsuume expresses concern about games he's worked on before that have been 'bigged up' at the preview stage only to be shot down when reviewed. As always, question marks remain over a game that is still eight months away from alpha, but on this evidence players can be assured that Crytek's first game is unlikely to be just another firstperson shooter.



Far Cry's emphasis is most definitely on OTT action scenes linked together with a plot straight out of a dumb sci-fi B-movie. The fact that the team is approaching everything with tongue firmly in cheek is to its credit. Don't expect another FPS with 'realism' as its watchword


Digitiser
READER INTERACTION - - - - - - - - - - - - 052
CHARACTER ASSASSINATION - - - - - - - - - 053
WHY DIGITISER'S MISSUNDERSTOOD - - 052
DOG BOLLOCKS - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 057
FAT SON - 053
STALKERS - 058
GUESTBOOK
MESSAGEBOARD
E-MAIL ME UP

love-me-do

Begun as a response to Oracle's games page back in 1993, 'Digitiser' has gone on to receive plaudits, ITC rebukes and photos of a fan's naked girlfriend. Edge talks to the mastermind behind it all, Paul Rose

About six years ago, I got a call from a guy at 'The Independent' saying, 'I'd like to do a feature on you, because 'Digitiser' is a phenomenon.' But he never called back," says **Paul Rose**, grinning into a half-full pint glass. "The reason he never called back was because his book had been picked up by a publisher. It was Alex Garland. After 'The Beach' came out, he sent me a copy and said that if I turned to page such-and-such I'd see a tribute to 'Digitiser'. One of the chapters is named after a 'Digi' phrase, 'Messed Up'. And he opened my eyes to the fact that people who are into games know 'Digitiser'."

Paul Rose, aka 'Digitiser's Mr Biffo, grins a lot. He also laughs, and giggles, and sometimes shrugs with a c'est-la-vie smile. There is not a trace of cynicism in his words, which is surprising coming from one of the country's longest-standing games journalists; 'Digitiser' is ten years old, and Rose has been writing it since the beginning. It is unlikely you'll have heard of him, although his nom de plume is significantly better known among gamers. As Mr Biffo says, people who are into games know 'Digitiser'.

People like Alex Garland, bestselling author of 'The Beach' and '28 Days Later', ("Probably 'Digitiser's biggest fan on Earth," says Rose) who once won a typically-'Digi' competition in which readers had to send a photograph of someone in an exotic location holding up a sign saying "Digitiser = Filth." The competition's title was Brown Trumpet; Alex Garland sent in a picture of one of his friends standing atop a temple in Thailand. History does not recall his prize, but the anecdote shows the sort of devotion that Channel 4's Teletext games page inspires, and that would ultimately rescue it from a management-led humour cull.

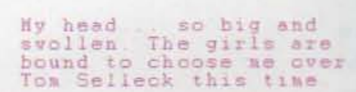
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"When I talk about 'Digitiser', I always say we. Which I think is some way of distancing myself from it, this anonymity thing. Always done it. Weirdest thing."

"Don't like the new redesigns. Don't mind saying that, but it's nothing to do with me."





GIRAFFE CAT

"It's one of my biggest bugbears with games that stories are written by developers that don't understand how to write a story. I mean, today I was playing Star Fox Adventures, and it was like, 'What's this about?! It's just a load of old bollocks.' There's no structure to it."

"I do think the medium's unfulfilled, and that there's so much more that can be done with games."



That comes later, though. The start, the very start, is in 1987, when Rose left school and got a job working for Ladbrokes as a graphic designer for its in-store materials. From there he moved to its teletext section, and then got a job working on the scoreboard at Wembley stadium, operating it during sporting events. Then one day in August 1992, a call came from the editor of Teletext, John Holt. Rose picks up the story.

"Teletext had just won the franchise from Oracle. John was looking for a designer, and someone had recommended me. Even back then teletext graphics were a dying art, and I've since gone on… I'm kind of like the Obi Wan Kenobi of teletext graphics, the last surviving Jedi. Anyway, I got the job at Teletext as a graphic designer."

During the run up to the launch of the service, Teletext put out an internal memo asking people for ideas for pages. Rose responded with a rough proposal for a games section. "They came back to me and said they were thinking of doing a games page, a single page – Oracle had a games page – and that it was going to be written by a guy called Tim Moore. They got us together and said 'Okay, we'll expand it into a magazine, but you've both got to write it together.' So I was asked to write 'Digitiser' with Tim, with no journalistic experience whatsoever – just a two-month dry run before we went on air. And I had to do it alongside my graphic design chores."

'Digitiser' launched on January 1, 1993, and proved controversial from the start. An opening-day statement announced its intention to cover all console formats, and incited the wrath of Amiga owners by referring to it as a "dying format." Immediately, the angry letters began to flood in. It didn't affect 'Digitiser's decision – and there'd be many more fanboy campaigns to come – but it did show Rose and Moore that 'Digitiser' had an immense audience, far exceeding that of even the biggest print magazine. All of a sudden, they had power. And a magazine to write, which wasn't easy.

"Neither of us had any idea how to go about reviewing games, or even where to get games from," Rose states, illustrating how they were thrown in the deep end. "We didn't even *think* of ringing up PR people and asking for review copies – we did a deal with a games importer who used to get our review copies in return for a credit at the bottom of the page. I think my first review was… God… *Green Dog the Surfer Dude*, on the Mega Drive. It was awful. I mean, I remember the review, and I wrote it in, well," he checks left and right for Dennis staff, "Sub-'C&VG' surfer speak; it was all like 'gnarly dude', and all that. And we were at a disadvantage with print magazines in that we didn't have screenshots, and that was pretty apparent from the off."

But while print mags could use game grabs, 'Digitiser's digital medium meant low lead times, and quicker information. More than that, the authors' freedom within their section meant they could compensate for the loss of press-kit imagery with nonsense jokes and pixel-graphic surrealism. The creators sparked off each other as soon as they met, and shared a sense of humour which would set the pattern for 'Digitiser's life so far; one that, as Rose puts it proudly, was "fairly stupid." And people started responding to it. "There were as many readers who read 'Digitiser' for the humour as the games. We got letters that said, 'Stop the games stuff.'" There's a pause. "Which we couldn't do, obviously.

"But I remember some fairly early stupid stuff we had on there. I got a call on a Saturday from one of the senior editorial team. I think we'd made some reference to someone playing on their Mega Drive, and an image of Noel Edmonds had emanated out of the top of it. She actually rang me up because she just wanted to double check that it was meant to be satire."

Then, one morning, Rose was reading 'The Sun' on the toilet – too much detail, as it happens, but he remembers the moment very clearly – and turned over a page to see the headline "Teletext Rapped Over Sick Videogame Joke." 'Digitiser' was less than a month old, and already heading for an encounter with the ITC.

Bad boys

"Tim had made a reference to epilepsy in a news piece – 'This is the game you've all heard about, now you too can develop epilepsy.' And it had gone on air. Then we took a call from a gentleman from the British Epilepsy Association, and, well, as far as Tim was concerned, the matter had been resolved, and the reference had been removed. But the gentleman from the BEA decided to go to the ITC, and I think from that very early moment we got a reputation within the company as, well, troublemakers. We got a reputation for being bad boys, rulebreakers."

They weren't being bad. They were just trying to amuse themselves, and understanding that means you're closer to understanding what makes 'Digitiser', and what makes it divide



Mr Biffo on why 'Digitiser's so misunderstood

"Fairly early on we put a few noses out of joint, never intentionally; we really enjoyed what we were doing and I think that came across on the page. But I also think the fact that we enjoyed ourselves, that we messed about in the office something rotten, kind of rubbed people up the wrong way. And even though the management at Teletext now is a completely different bunch of people, somehow this troublemaker reputation endured."

Wiped out

"We've always had trouble getting games from PR people. Now it's better, because we've got a guy called Gavin Lambert who does the tips, charts, and letters, and he's based at Teletext and he's great at chasing up games. But PR people have always distrusted us, generally speaking. Anyway, *Wipeout* came out, biggest game yet on the PlayStation, and we went through hell trying to get it. Calls weren't being answered, emails were being ignored. So we did the only thing left open to us; get Fat Sow to put out a request for it on air. Unfortunately, we went a little bit too far, and… um, yes, there was some… trouble."

Dog bollocks

"Gossi the Dog. ITC's only complaint, except for the epilepsy thing. Gossi the Dog had a complaint upheld from the RSPCA, complaining – and it was a misunderstood reference, it wasn't what it said at all – that there was a reference to a dog being beaten with a belt. A cartoon dog, called Gossi, who does the news."

Handbags at dawn

"Steve Starvis at Eidos is a funny one. Always slightly nervy. I remember one ECTS a couple of years ago, something in the write-up of the previous show had obviously bothered him. He approached me and told me he'd got a better bag this year. I hadn't remembered, but apparently I'd made some reference to him having a girl's handbag on air, and he'd held a grudge for a year."

Booby juice

"Yesterday I had to question a decision to remove the phrase 'rancid tramp'. I mean, I've written for a kid's show called 'My Parents are Aliens', which is on at 4.30pm on ITV. One episode of the show featured the phrase 'booby juice'. The father had grown a pair of breasts and was feeding his children breast milk for breakfast. I'm pretty sure that if CITV can have that on at 4.30 in the afternoon, I can get the phrase 'rancid tramp' in Digitiser without the ITC coming down on us."

Meanie machines

"'Mean Machines' started putting digs at 'Digi' in their letters pages, and we started digging back. But of course, we could dig harder and faster and every single day. It eventually ended when editor Steve Merrett… well, there was one specific challenge he put to us, something about viewing figures. We sent him this absurd letter back, where we called him biscuit-skin, fish-back, and all these other things, along with the statistics that proved our point. And in the next issue of 'Mean Machines' there was some briefly worded retraction, and that was the end of that."

Oh no – it's raining!

MR SUNNY



Mr Biffo on reader interaction

Incentives

"At one point we got hold of a bunch of signed photos – a stack, about a foot high – of ITV weathergirls, and we gave them away to every letter writer for about three months. They had a choice as well, they had to request Sian Lloyd or whatever. In the early days we had this guy who… this is terrible actually. I probably shouldn't tell you this. But no, he used to send us naked polaroids of his girlfriend. And we used to send him stuff back. And he'd send us more. We'd send him free games. Um. Yeah. They were great! Proper Polaroids! Fantastic!"

Regulars

"Stuart N Hardy wrote to us, but then he wrote to every games mag and every other publication in the country. We had a girl called Poppy who used to send us lovely perfume-scented letters. Oh, and there was The Girl with the Golden Game Boy. Danny Boyd, Luton Area was the only letter writer we ever made up. He was a precursor to Fat Sow. Although we always got an immense amount of mail, it was always the same kind of letters, so I started writing under the pseudonym, sending inflammatory letters that'd piss people off, and then we'd get thousands of letters in response."

Stalkers

"There was one reader we had to call the police about. It started out with him sending photos of himself in a department store with his trousers round his ankles. That was for one of the competitions, Brown Trumpet – "Digitiser Destroyed Me" – so fair enough, he was getting into the spirit of the thing. He'd write to us a lot anyway, but slowly the frequency increased, until we were getting letters from him every day. The letters started out about games. Eventually they stopped being about games. And then they started to cover both sides of the paper, no start or finish, and they'd rant a lot about how we were putting up subliminal messages accusing him of being gay. Then he started writing on the outside of the letter – he wouldn't put stamps on, just wrote Freepost, even though it wasn't, and it always got to us – and then one day he started sending us shit. Oh, and death threats."

Celebrities

"Peter Serafinowicz, voice of Darth Maul. He's 'Digitiser's second biggest fan. Alex Garland described me as a Matthew Smith figure. We were going to have interviews with celebrity gamers, right at the very beginning. The only one we ever got was some bloke from Carter USM. Oh, and, God, we got Gary Glitter as well. I don't know if we ever ran it though – it was all one word responses."

people so clearly. Rose puts it eloquently thus, "People don't get the jokes, and so don't get them because they don't make any sense, that it makes them angry. Literally makes them really cross, and confused and upset that they're not in on the jokes. It's like McCarthyism, or fascism, or human nature. You want to destroy what you don't understand."

The love/hate dichotomy was already forming, and the readers at both extremes started to get curious. "Fairly early on, we started to get letters from people wanting to know just who the hell we were. It's something that we felt kindred of spirit with **Edge** for, because you never plastered your magazine with photographs of yourselves, and never put your names to things, and we hated that whole attempt to make celebrities out of reviewers – it always got under my skin.

"Anyway, we wanted to respond to letters, and by this point we had another guy working for us called Adam Keeble. So there were three of us and, at the time, we were going through this phase of saying things were 'Corky the Cat' or 'Biffo the Bear, man', which I suppose is a precursor to The Snake's style of speaking. So when we were seeking nom de plumes for ourselves, I ended up as Mr Biffo. Adam was Mr Cheese – because prior to working for 'Digi', he'd won one of our competitions using that pseudonym – and Tim, for whatever reason, called himself Mr Hairs. Of course, the irony of all this was that our attempt at anonymity completely backfired, and just fuelled the fire."

'Digitiser's popularity snowballed into a million-strong cult, and Rose's writing improved immeasurably too, something that he ascribes to both the restrictions of writing within a 60-word-per-page limit, and to Moore's influence. Moore had been a journalist for years before joining Teletext, and Rose claims the best period in 'Digitiser's life was just before he left. "I owe a massive debt to him," he says. "We worked so close together for such a long time, and he taught me to write. And I'm now the most anal person when it comes to grammar and spelling."

The quickfire turnaround for generating copy wasn't without its problems, though.

"I think part of the problem with 'Digi' is that it's daily, and I've kind of forgotten what I've written from one day to the next. With that turnover I'll sometimes say something, and by the time I'm regretting putting something on air, it's on air." And we're back to being misunderstood again. "The thing is, everything in 'Digi' is done tongue in cheek. I have this reputation that is so unjust, that's of being slightly embittered and full of spite and venom, and that's about as far removed from me as you can possibly get. Any time 'Digi' does get like that, with Fat Sow and so on, it's always tongue in cheek, and I'm shrugging my shoulders, not caring enough to really get annoyed about anything. That's just me."

The office

Teletext's upper management, on the other hand, weren't shrugging their shoulders. Despite excellent viewing figures and proportionate advertising income, Rose was aware of an anti-'Digi' movement running through the company. "Oh, completely. I know when a new sub-editor started, they were always told to keep an eye on us," he sighs, like someone who's grown to accept that he'll always be misrepresented. "And this story is why I'll never work in an office again, these kinds of days. It was a team-building day out, and we had to all sit round and say what the first thing we'd do if Prince Charles was killed in a skiing accident. And someone said 'Well, I'd check 'Digitiser' to make sure they didn't have any sick jokes about skiing,' in all seriousness. And everyone else was sat round agreeing with them. And I was like, 'Give me some credit!'"

In September of last year, the unpleasantness came to a head in what Rose refers to as 'DigiGate'. Teletext executives issued instructions that 'Digitiser's defining humour was to stop. **Edge** wonders if Mr Biffo saw it coming?

"I felt it had been coming for ten years. Completely. I've always been astonished that,



"Ten years, and you just see the same cycles repeating. I've seen trends come, go, come back again. Currently we're pissing off Xbox owners."

Moc-moc-a-moc!



MAGIC MONKEY

Daddy, the retro style is the new I, Mice Tweet…

I'm crabbing you up, man!

I'm crabbing you up, man!

I'm crabbing you up, man!

"The typical 'Digi' reader? Certainly not best-selling novelists and the voice of Darth Maul."

"We've gone back to scoring out of ten. We started out of five, then went percentages, then out of ten, then back to five, and now out of ten again. I mean, I've seen on the 'Net already people saying, 'Didn't they say we should do away with review scores altogether?' and we have. But I was 21 when I started, and in ten years people change, grow up, and they're allowed to change their opinion. In two years' time I might say 'Sod it' and go back to doing percentages, marks out of 1000, I don't know!"

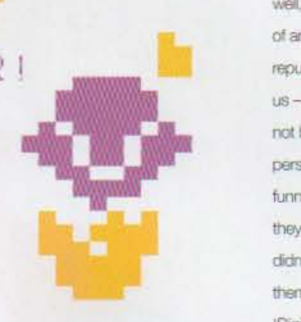
"I mean, we've changed our minds on reviews. We might stick a game in the top ten early in the year, and then by the end we'll be quietly leaving it out. It's human to change your mind."



Daddy?

Daddy Cool is back, yeah! Cool style is the new style, baby. I'm ice fresh and red hot!

IT'S GARY LINEKER!



"What they don't realise is they're posting on these forums – 'Have you seen what they're saying about the Xbox?' and it's like, 'Thanks, you've given us an extra 20 viewers!'"



"John [Pickford, of Zed Two] called my bluff. Knowing that I'd had experience of screenwriting and supposedly knew how a story should be structured, and knowing my opinion on game plots, he dropped me an email, and asked me if I fancied writing for his next game."

"When I started doing it, I couldn't get out of the mindset of writing a videogames script. So all the dialogue was incredibly stagey, and it read like a videogame. It was John who pulled me away from that and said, 'This is actually a bit shit', and then I started writing it like a proper script."



Merry Christmas, everyone!!!

well, Christ, it's lasted ten years, and that's a hell of an achievement. But I was aware we had this reputation, and that people didn't particularly like us – particularly over the last five years, when I've not been based at Teletext, and I was just the person sending in copy that they didn't think was funny. It annoyed them. It spoke in a language they didn't understand – and of course they didn't understand it, because it wasn't aimed at them, because they were media executives and 'Digitiser' was aimed at videogames fans. To their credit, they've understood that now, and they know that 'Digitiser' works."

At the time, though, things were different. Rose speaks deliberately, carefully watching his words. "The excuse I was given was that it was a cost-cutting measure. But in the process of that decision, when I was told that 'Digitiser' was being reduced to three days a week, albeit with no reduction in copy, I was also told that they didn't think it was funny, and that it had to stop being funny. Or stop being not funny. I had no choice but to go along with it."

Panel beaters

So out went the jokes; Ring-Sir, Zombie Dave, Fat Sow, et al; and out went Panel 4, too, 'Digitiser's weekly column by a guest games expert. Rose wasn't quite as sad to see that disappear. "I was sorry to see Stuart Campbell go. I think the other columnists weren't giving it their full attention. I think Violet Berlin would be the first to admit that." Not that it didn't cause some pain, thanks to Campbell's final column, never actually published. Rose grimaces a little, though the smile doesn't disappear completely.

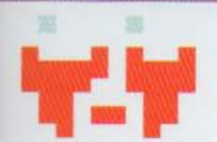
"I can see what he was doing, and Stuart won't like me saying this, but that, in the middle of it all. Things got really horrible, it was really quite unpleasant. Teletext have said to me, 'We handled it really badly,' and they did, they were needlessly nasty to me, unpleasant and confrontational, and they've apologised and that's fine. And, then, in the middle of that, Stuart sent in this Panel 4 that bloody well made everything worse." He grins. "I'm like, 'Cheers Stuart, I'm trying to pour water on the flames, and you've just chucked a can of petrol in.'" While Campbell's rant was unpublished, it can be read in full on the Internet at http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/estate/dh69/wos/world/digi/digi72.htm

While 'Digitiser' went through the motions for a year, losing its cult status and losing viewers, Rose was busy elsewhere, writing for Sooty and 'My Parents are Aliens' for CITV, bringing 'Bubblegun' strip 'Knife and Wife' to Channel 4 ("It was shite. I don't mind saying that. Even though it had the most amazing cast, my script wasn't up to standard. That said, it almost got commissioned."), and producing a story for Zed Two's promising *Pillage*. On the other hand, passionate 'Digitiser' fans were busy organising and executing a war of written attrition against the Teletext bosses, demanding the return of editorial control to Mr Biffo.

"It's only been in the last year, since DigiGate, that I've actually understood 'Digitiser's popularity," says Rose. "For a long time I've worked from home. I went freelance five years ago, and I'm based at home in my little cocoon – all the post goes to Teletext, so do the emails. But I did get to see a percentage of the letters that went there after the changes. And on top of that, the sheer volume of personal emails I got to my home address. I started to understand, for the first time in nine years that, hang on, this is actually quite popular, isn't it?"

Eventually, Teletext went back on its original decision, and the character – but not the characters, at least not just yet – returned to 'Digitiser'. "The justification that Teletext gave me last year when they said I'd got to stop the funny stuff was that it excludes people. I would argue that it was the exact opposite. They said this 'Pythonesque' – their word not mine – humour alienates and excludes people. I think the subsequent letter writing campaign proved that more people felt part of the clique than not."

The future for the section looks even brighter. "There's talk of properly relaunching the Website next summer. Properly, this time, with reviews, an updated daily service, and so on. Whether it'll work... I mean, we're not going to have the pixellated graphics on there. But I dunno, the Web, digital teletext is in its infancy... I mean, it's funny, but I've never felt the destiny of 'Digitiser's in my hands. It's up to Teletext if they want to keep going with it, and for the first time in ten years they're fully behind it. We've always been this bad boy, Teletext's dirty secret, but now they want to integrate us."

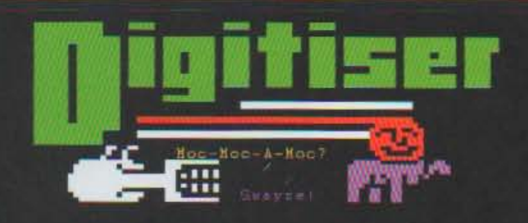


And while Rose gets ever busier – he's currently writing for 'Crossroads', hoping to do the same for 'EastEnders', and developing "a proper grown-up comedy drama" for Granada – he doesn't appear to have any intention of leaving Teletext and his Jedi pixel skills behind. "It's funny. If I was going to quit 'Digi', I think I'd have done it last year. I do it now because I love it. That said, there wasn't a lot of love going into it over the last year – but hey, there wasn't a lot of love going both ways between myself and Teletext. But that's changed, and for the tenth anniversary I'm allowed to restore some dignity to the pages, get some humour and a little character back in there."

No fatal royal skiing accidents, then? "I'm a mature adult," smirks Rose. "I know when something's appropriate and when something isn't. Ten years on, and we've never offended anyone. Um, apart from that one man, about epilepsy." And a couple of others, but who's counting? Besides, "I've never gone out of my way to cause trouble. My attitude is to keep my head low down in the trenches, dodge as many bullets as possible, keep in the shadows."

But, for all his pretentions to shyness, Rose – or his alter-ego, at least – is vocal about games. Biffo on hardcore gamers: "It's a fundamental problem in the hardcore games-playing community that they don't see that you're allowed to change your opinion on something." Biffo on *Star Fox Adventures*: "It's got an ice level, it's got a lava level, and it's got barrels that roll down a hill. The reason it has them is because, hey, games have those." Biffo on *Blinx*: "I wish I'd laid into it a bit more. Partly because Xbox owners are pissing me off, and partly because I was just too lenient on it. It's offensive."

Ah, got to love those fanboys. "At the moment the Xbox owners are raging at us. I had a look at the 'Official Xbox Magazine' forums a couple of months ago, and they're all moaning about 'Digitiser', trying to organise a letter-writing campaign to get us taken off the air. You wouldn't believe the number of campaigns there've been to have 'Digitiser' taken off the air: there's been Dreamcast owners, Amiga owners, PC owners, and it's like," Mr Biffo pauses and grins at an imaginary audience of h8rs, "we're still here, boys." Sure. **Edge** wouldn't have it any other way.



Mr Biffo on the characters of 'Digitiser'

"It's difficult to talk about any of the characters without incriminating myself, because I always felt that part of the reason why I found them funny is because they have no place in being there. And we got away with it until last September, which fair dues to Teletext, came down to them saying, 'Why the hell is this half elephant man on here telling jokes that make no sense?'"

The Man



"We started with The Man With The Long Chin, who was originally called The Man With The Long Chin Wearing A Pink Beret, which was just stupid, and was eventually just shortened to The Man. You work for a games magazine, you get sent freebies and stuff, which eventually start to clutter up the office. So we wanted to find a way to give it away, rather than hoard it at home, and I think I drew this graphic on a page for a competition of a man in a pink beret, and people would win something from his secret pocket. And then at some point that evolved into The Man's Diary. I honestly can't tell you how that link was made."

The Man's Daddy



"The Man's Daddy is without a doubt my favourite. It never, *ever* made any sense. In fact – and this is probably true of 'Digitiser' of a whole, and probably the reason why we've had a few run-ins with various people over the years – you literally love it or hate it. It's such an extreme of hate, such an extreme of love. And there were even those extremes within the organisation that airs 'Digitiser'. People who loved it, people who absolutely hated it. The levels of vitriol we've had in letters over the years, and the levels of love – *genuine* love."

The Snakes



"The Snakes were another of my favourites, and Fox ended up making a pilot for a TV version. The Snakes made it onto 'Bubblegun', which is where Fox Kids picked it up. It was for interstitials, and it had 'I cuss you bad' on there and everything. They did it with sock puppets, with Phil Cornwell doing the voices."



Fat Sow

"Fat Sow was a way to be anonymous. One thing that always wound us up about games mags was that they weren't opinionated – they never gave opinions, it was always very carefully worded so as not to offend their friends the PR people. We had to provide an alternative, because at the time, there wasn't an **Edge**, and there wasn't an Internet. We didn't mind speaking our minds, and we were honest, and because we weren't getting games from PR people we didn't owe anyone favours. And we always used to have that disclaimer at the bottom 'Fat Sow's views do not necessarily coincide with 'Digitiser's' and so on."

Zombie Dave.



"Zombie Dave. <pause> What? <laughter> How did I get away with it? <laughter> I think the easiest answer is, well, we didn't get away with it, did we? Because they pulled the humour. I don't think they got... *specific* jokes... but I think they knew there was something going on underneath the surface. I still maintain that Zombie Dave never said anything rude, anyway."

Cyber X

"I might bring him back. It goes back to the whole faces in magazines things. There was one specific journalist... in his magazine, a games magazine for God's sake, he had a diary section – a photo journal of him going out clubbing. And it was like 'hello?!' I mean, I'm a fine one to talk – I have swearing zombies and furious pigs on my pages, and a half elephant man who tells nonsense jokes but still, it just seems so self-indulgent. That Dave Perry school of thinking – no self awareness. I did an article on types of games journalist, actually. Future journalists all looked exactly the same – all had little round glasses, all really tall. All of them. And all Emap journalists were of a type too – lairy, ill-educated barrow boys."

Just as **Edge** went to press Paul Rose contacted the magazine to announce his departure from Teletext, something which had been brewing for a while. He had this to say on the subject: "What with the tenth anniversary looming, Teletext's admission that it made a mistake a year ago by canning the humour, thereby allowing me to restore some dignity to the pages, the **Edge** feature, and the fact that I've just been offered a writing gig on 'EastEnders' and a Channel 4 sitcom – the planets seemed to be in alignment. The time was right." His input into 'Digitiser' will be sadly missed.



The videogame collecting market grows with rare voracity. But, if you're a part of it – or have had your interest piqued by **Edge**'s recent **Retro** special – you'll be aware that despite, or perhaps because of, its popularity it can be quite a minefield. So it makes sense to use a guide, and **Edge**'s Collector's Series will build over the coming months to become just that.

These articles will cover the most treasured formats, genres and games, and they kick off with an in-depth look at what is perceived to be the acme of collectables – SNK's Neo-Geo Advanced Entertainment System.

EDGE Collector's Series

EDGE®
Collector's Series





"It was your constant favour and encouragement which fuelled our passion to make better games. As a final request, we ask that [you] continue to love the games because the future of those who carry our remaining DNA will start from that passion." **Extract from SNK's closing statement, October 2001**

Out with the old, in with the Neo

A mythical, untouchable creature for most in the 16bit era, SNK's Neo-Geo Advanced Entertainment System was largely forgotten in the 3D revolution. But the most powerful dedicated 2D platform has lived on through three console wars and has now become the most collectable format ever. Welcome to 2D Eden, the colourful Neo-world order...

If the birth of eloquence does indeed mark the death of passion then **Edge** must write with care. For when approaching the Neo-Geo Advanced Entertainment System (AES), a format so fit to burst with contagious developer and consumer passion, it is all too easy to soliloquise dismissively about fanboys. Especially since the console has been so criminally ignored by western critics throughout its existence. It seems that the love, care and esteem that the 2D coding craftsmen held for this machine has been only matched by the passion kindled, occasionally blind but frequently justified, in the hearts of numerous generations of videogame connoisseurs.

"Prohibitively expensive, shockingly powerful and still as sleek as it was 12 years ago, the Neo-Geo plays host to some of the finest 2D games"

The Neo-Geo home system was, is and looks to always be the most exclusive club off the high street of gaming. Prohibitively expensive, shockingly powerful and still as designer sleek as the day it rolled off the production line some 12 years ago, the Neo-Geo plays host to some of the finest slices of 2D design money will ever buy. And money is what you will need – followed by almost as much dedication for seeking out that elusive needle in a global haystack.

There have only been around 130 games released for the system since its inception but with prices constantly rising it is going to take some treasure hunting to finish the collection. And you have some rich and determined competition. For, like all exclusive clubs, members guard its exclusivity and its existence with their wallets.

Unbelievably, this story is far from over. When the arcade giant Playmore purchased SNK's intellectual property, hopes that the brand would emerge from financial ruin were kindled. In fact, much of the SNK staff remained intact.

Dedicated independent developers have sprung up all over the east and no less than four new titles have been released this year. The release of this amount of new titles is normally nothing to write home about but when they include



One of the system's most enjoyable series is also its most collectable, with certain instalments, in particular guises, commanding thousands of dollars at auction



SNK's fighting games were often simultaneously released alongside in-depth guide books detailing moves for the home and the arcade. *Fatal Fury* is a common example



One of the beauties of the *Slug* series is, simply, its beauty: this is bitmapped art at its most elaborate. Crucially, the game elements are animated with great attention to detail

sequels to the legendary *Metal Slug* and *King of Fighters* series, those who know pay attention. The system has evaded all the pitfalls and cycles of the mainstream by constantly swimming fervently in the opposite direction. And while the world regards 2D as something as primitive as cave painting compared to 3D's rendered curves, more and more players are realising that there is a place in this world for such a stylistic medium. Especially when it can play so well. The Neo-Geo home cart system has now become the longest-running videogame system ever (including Game Boy) and one of the strangest enigmas our history will ever see. In the last three years the number of Neo-Geo buyers has risen dramatically and it is currently attracting discerning players and financially solvent collectors the world over.

The king of fighters

In the current industry climate of identikit home machines it's difficult to comprehend quite what a bombshell the Neo-Geo was. A machine so powerful it brought the Japanese arcade back home, pixel for frame, a full decade before Dreamcast was a twinkle in Naomi's eye. In 1989, SNK entered the home system market with the Neo-Geo, originally intending the machine to be a Japanese home rental system boasting the exact workings of its successful arcade MVS system (see 'SNK and its history'). The home cart system soon took root in its homeland mainly due to word of mouth emanating fron the arcade scene. To the typical Japanese arcade fanatic th thought of owning the actual coding on a format that would into a space-starved Tokyo bedsit was too good to be true. Especially when the software was so very refined.

SNK's brand was to soon become synonymous with th fighting genre. This was mainly thanks to Takashi Nishiyama who had previously worked on the original *Street Fighter* at Capcom. He was poached by SNK and helped launch its own rival to Capcom's best: SNK's *Fatal Fury*. *Fatal Fury* wa

"*Fatal Fury* was released in the same year as *Street Fighter II* and even then boasted innovative features such as front and rear planes and a coop mode



SNK games, especially fighters, were released into 2000 and beyond



The original Neo-Geo console was built with arcade sensibilities in mind, its legendary controllers almost as large as the machine itself



Official (Neo-Geo World) and unofficial (such as Neo-Geo Land, pictured above) SNK-themed entertainment centres sprang up over Japan. Many still operate today



released in the same year as *Street Fighter II* and even then boasted innovative features such as front and rear planes and a twoplayer cooperative mode. Nishiyama-san went on to launch and refine such legendary and diverse series as *Samurai Shodown*, *King of Fighters* and *Metal Slug*.

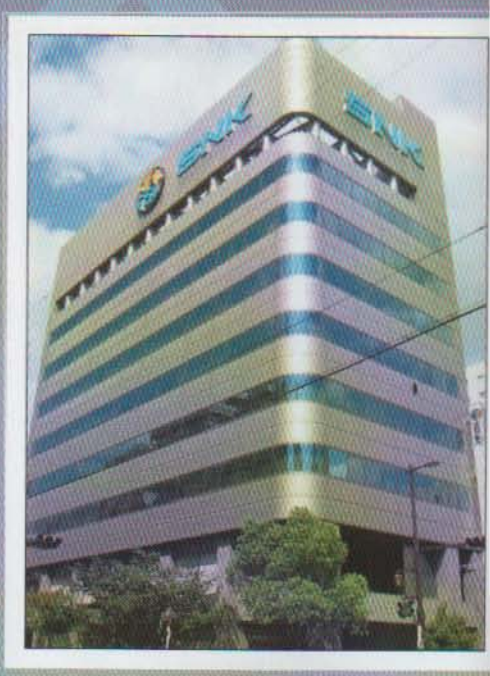
While Capcom played within fairly set boundaries with its fighting games, SNK pushed the genre in all kinds of directions. *Kizuna Encounter* explored the tag team angle, *Art of Fighting* the technical *Virtua Fighter* style, *Last Blade* the fast sword-based fighter. All the time the *King of Fighters* and *Fatal Fury* series ran alongside each other providing gamers with the tweaked updates they required. However, unlike the orthodox two-minute fix of the traditional arcade game these games took the spectator element of the Capcom games and implemented a new depth of gameplay, allowing mastery unseen before. This fed the home market with players seeking to master characters in privacy and then display their skills in public. A new breed of professional Japanese arcade player was born. It is testimony to the depth of these games that high-profile national tournaments are still held across the globe today.

The American dream

Initial expectations were so high worldwide as a result of good import reviews that SNK's system secured a release in both the American and European territories. However, despite sales pushes of the Neo-Geo utilising 'Penthouse' magazine ads, game leaflets, and large information packets, the overseas sales the company dreamt of never materialised. Gamers at school in the early '90s will recall huddled rumours of an ubermachine more powerful than Sega and Nintendo's best and more expensive than their education. Indeed, cost was the taproot of the Neo's problems and almost sealed its fate before it hit the shelves. No parent in their right mind was likely to shell out the $600 asking price for this machine followed by a $250 game when for the same price they could secure a SNES and its mascot and still have enough change leftover for a used car. Indeed, some videogame magazine publishers at the time could scarcely afford the machine, let alone the software for review. So the Neo-Geo sank into relative obscurity – a legend gamers would always dream of rather than play with.



Two CD-based variations of the AES were released for the gamer on a budget. Their lengthy loading times were hard to stomach, though



SNK's huge offices in Osaka still stand proud and tall. New encumbent Playmore has left the gigantic logo untouched



Variants of the AES system such as this MVS/AES hybrid – used in Japanese hotels – fetch extraordinary prices when they surface. This is genuine collector's territory



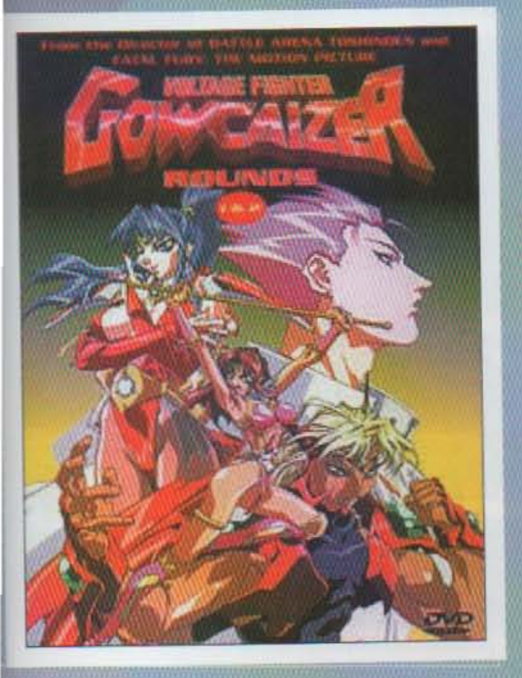
Famously, Neo-Geo carts wear their sizes boldly on their sleeves. Where once games bore '28 MEGS' tags, a newer title such as *Mark of the Wolves* weighs in at a hefty 688

With the advent of 3D and Suzuki-san's *Virtua Fighter* series the world's eyes turned to polygonal pastures and SNK was left perfecting 2D genres, with only a niche home audience and arcade lovers to applaud. But those who did keep their eyes on the Neo's slowly growing canon of material would be treated to some of the most inspired 2D programming ever seen. More and more players have woken up to this fact, which has resulted in the most active collecting niche in the videogame world.

One ring to rule them all

Shawn McCleskey, 26, lives and works from offices in Memphis where he is responsible for the distribution of new English home carts through his internationally acclaimed Web site, Neo-Geo.com. *King of Fighters 2002*, released on December 16, is the sixth release from a thriving and growing community which has fast become Mecca for all Neo-Geo collectors. The Neo Store attracts collectors the world over and there is a trading forum that operates like a frenzied auction house for SNK's wunderkind.

McClesky began collecting at the age of 16 in 1993 and has seen the scene explode: "From the time I began collecting right up until 1999 a high-end title such as *Metal Slug 1* (either version) could be had for $500. In recent times the Neo Store has sold two copies of *Metal Slug*: one for $2,450 (English) and another for $2,250 (Japanese). Simone D'Amico, our price guide analyst, estimates a mint copy will soon approach the $3,000 mark." This extraordinary rise in value is almost unprecedented in any area of product sales let alone the second-hand game market. McClesky explains some of the factors that have led to this situation: "Many Neo-Geo home carts have experienced a sharp, steady gain in prices over the past tw years. This mainly applies to the rare home carts, and even more so for the rare English home carts. There are many factors involved here. Before the Internet, Neo-Geo home carts could only be found through ads in gaming magazine or from used videogame stores. Now the world is much smaller, so to speak – brought closer together thanks to th Internet. Consumer awareness is higher than ever, and Neo Geo games that were never heard of in the western world a now available on the secondary market. At the most basic





Cult Neo-Geo titles have spawned numerous Japanese animation specials – some of which will no doubt be more familiar than others

These are the two rarest Neo-Geo carts in existence today. You can expect to pay in the region of $2,500 for a European version of *Ultimate 11* (also known as *Super Sidekicks 4*)



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Many Neo-Geo favourites made the transition to Sega's Dreamcast hardware. Needless to say, the value of these disc-based titles does not rival that of Neo-Geo cart originals

level what we have here is a product with limited supply combined with a healthy demand. Unlike other home systems, these games start anywhere from $250 to the current $325 when purchased new at release. Some games can escalate as high as triple during the first year of release, such as *Mark of the Wolves*, which went as high as $800 only several months after its release."

In addition to the issues of increased general collector interest in the system, McClesky highlights the fact that a lot of these games are virtually irreplaceable. Normally, collectors do not want to part with home carts from their personal collection unless they are trading for another game. Even a significant profit may not be sufficient enough to persuade a hardcore collector from selling out. He realises just how hard it can be to replace top items. This means that very few of the rare titles ever become available. The site has its own famous price guide which most of the global collecting community now use as a basis for their prices: "Some even say that Neo-Geo.com is to blame for the spike in prices," suggests McClesky. "The public price guides we maintain promote buyer and seller awareness. The forums bring traffic and interest. The collection gallery promotes collecting. For those who enjoy collecting, strong prices can be interpreted as a direct reflection of the strong interest that exists, and a growing interest at that. Keep in mind that the Internet is still growing, and with this growth we experience a constant influx of new collectors and gamers."

"The Neo Store has sold an English copy of *Metal Slug* for $2,450. Our price guide analyst estimates a mint copy will soon approach $3,000"

Money for old code?

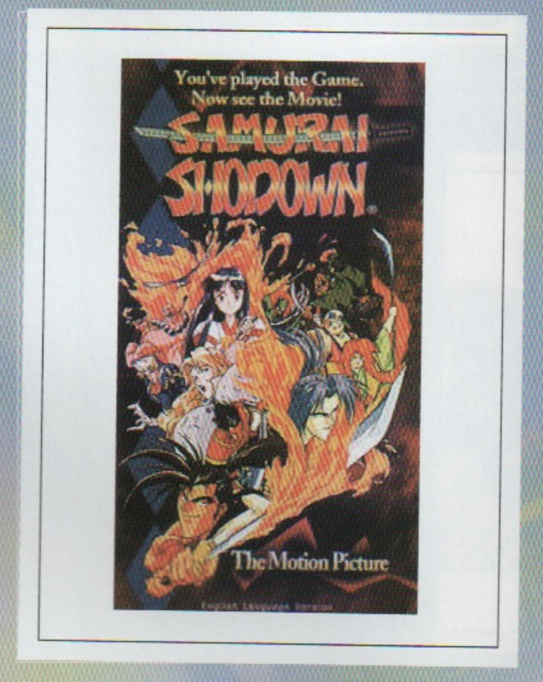
Some fear that the bottom is set to fall out of the market and that games will lose their value as quickly as they gained. McClesky is adamant: "If a Pez dispenser can reach $90,000 on ebay and still not have met the reserve, I would expect the Neo-Geo market to easily maintain its current price level. The



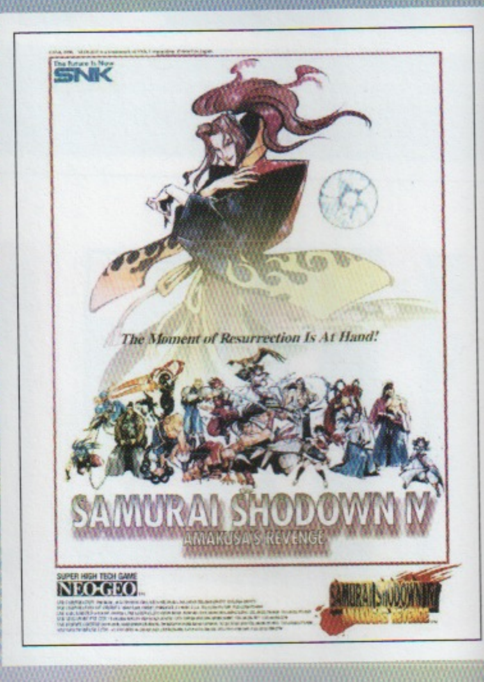
TSS and *Chibi Quiz* are both popular with collectors. However, actually playing these games, rather than simply acquiring them for raw value, is another matter entirely...



Although all games were compatible with all systems (region lockouts simply did not exist), some, such as *Samurai Shodown*, were censored for blood and partial nudity



Though not as polished as, say, the 'Street Fighter' OAV, the likes of 'Samurai Shodown' make interesting viewing for the true fan



Few games on mainstream hardware make it to a fourth iteration, but players' appetite for the *Shodown* series has seen it do just th

new releases only attract more gamers and gamers entering the Neo scene soon become collectors." Ebay examples such as the Pez dispenser give some perspective to what the deserters call an overpriced market.

If every collecting niche has its untouchable artifacts, what is the Neo follower's Holy Grail? McClesky, unsurprisingly, holds the cup: "My most prized home cartridge, the European release of *Kizuna Encounter*, was obtained shortly after I began collecting. Of all things, I traded a *Super Dodgeball* conversion (currently worth $350) as an even trade for the seemingly irreplaceable Euro *Kizuna*. There are only two copies in confirmed existence. I own one copy, which I purchased from a French collector. To find other copies in the world I have offered $200 just for a picture of the game. Only one other copy surfaced (the owner confirmed manual text, etc), but this collector wishes to remain anonymous. During 1996 the European offices used to release anything up to 1,000 carts of any particular game. What happened to the other carts is unknown. We have many reports of sightings in various shops through the years but no one has come forward to collect the $200 reward for simply owning a genuine copy. It's extremely difficult to price European *Kizuna* because it never seems to leave a collector's possession. Put it this way: I'm willing to pay $3,000+ for an authentic *Kizuna*. If I had to estimate, I would say it would have around a $5,000 ending price. The highest auction to date for a single AES home cart was $2,800 for a mint English *Metal Slug*. In 1999, the Neo-Geo collecting community was still learning about the various versions of home carts that existed around the world. Games like European *Double Dragon* and *Ultimate 11* were just beginning to surface as fresh overseas contacts entered the scene. Years have passed, and pretty much all of the known home cartridge variants have been accounted for

"I'm willing to pay $3,000+ for an authentic *Kizuna Encounter*. If I had to estimate, I would say it would have a $5,000 ending price at auction"



Even though the Neo-Geo CD variants are always inferior, they can still fetch high prices. *Last Blade 2* will set you back up to £60, for example



The *King of Fighters* series remains a firm fan favourite. Its creators are ex-Capcomites, and that influence shines through strongly

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and can be seen in John Thacker's Master List, which is hosted on Neo-Geo.com."

Collectors are renowned for completing the set and moving on. **Edge** wonders: where next for the scene? "The age of Neo-Geo.com membership ranges from 15 to 40s, the average age being mid-20s. We are not children and I do not anticipate that we will outgrow our common interests anytime soon," says McClesky. "I often hear of people living on ramen noodle diets to conserve money for purchases then selling off their collections for a quick buck but they seemingly always regret and buy back again at the new higher price." The AES endures because the MVS still has life. The MVS is still popular on a global scale and is booming in South America and the non-Japanese eastern countries. With this in mind, the MVS market still has a bright short-term future, which will generate more interest in the AES market.

King of Fighters '02 was recently released as a coin-op, and *SNK vs Capcom* (an arcade update of the great NGPC interpretation) is perhaps the most anticipated game in the history of the Neo-Geo. This blockbuster is expected for release in the second or third quarter of '03. *SNK vs Capcom* is a title that could breathe significant new life in the Neo, attracting new gamers to the collector scene. Time will tell.

In issue 80, **Edge** offered this simple test as to whether you are a hardcore gamer: have you ever owned a piece of hardware with an SNK logo on it? So, is it the ultimate gamer's status symbol? Perhaps. Eden for original 2D perfection? Without question.

SNK and its history

Shin Nihon Kikaku, or 'New Japan Project', began operations on July 22 1978, releasing its first *Breakout*-style game *Maikon Kit* and then moving into other genres with titles such as *Vanguard* (1981), an acclaimed scrolling shooter. Diverse titles such as *Lasso* (1982), *Mad Crasher* (1984), *Gladiator 1984* (1984), *Arian Mission* (1985), *Athena* (1986) and *Psycho Soldier* (1986) all helped build SNK's popularity in the arcades. In 1986 the company formally changed its name to SNK Corporation and signed a thirdparty licence deal allowing it to develop games for various machines, resulting in classics such as *Baseball Stars*, *Ikari Warriors* (Famicom) and *Funny Field* (Game Boy). But although working as a licensee for Nintendo was lucrative at first, SNK's management felt that it was about to slip into thirdparty obscurity.

In 1989 SNK made its first break from the mainstream and decided to return to its arcade roots and invigorate an industry diversely affected by the success of the home console market. The idea was revolutionary: to manufacture the interchangeable game carts seen in the home market for an arcade system. Prior to this invention arcade operators either had to physically implement a fragile new PCB into a cabinet or simply settle for a dedicated cabinet for just one game. SNK's modular setup was christened the Multi Videogame System (MVS).

Then, in an unprecedented move, SNK released the exact inner workings of its MVS cabinet in a home console format. Originally released as a rental-only system, after just two months SNK pulled the system from the rental market realising that gamers were desperate to buy the hardware. Although identical in content, the cartridges for the home (AES) and arcade (MVS) systems were physically different, originally in an effort to prevent arcade operators using the then-cheaper home versions at their arcades. However, SNK often interchanged two versions to reflect market demands, taking the innards from one version and placing it in its counterpart plastic.

After the release of the AES and MVS systems, SNK proceeded to build a fan empire, releasing all the game paraphernalia a Japanese enthusiast would expect and more, ranging from bath towels to movies. Even dedicated Neo-Geo arcades were created. SNK was full of ideas way ahead of its time. From the memory card interchangeability on the MVS and AES machines to *Minnasanno Okagesamadesu*, one of the mah jong cartridge games for Neo developed (in prototype form) with a built-in modem, for the 'Neo-Geo Online Network'. However, SNK's business ideals always seemed slightly unprofessional at many levels, especially with regard to foreign territories.

The relationship between SNK of Japan and SNK of America was never strong. **Chad Okada**, the customer service manager who left SNK for Sony pastures in late 1994, went on record saying: "SNK Japan did not share information with SNK of the US. We would often have to go out and purchase European imported products to find out what in the pipeline." **Tony Gonzalez** of the tech department in Torrance highlights the breakdown within SNK America between staff and management: "Marty Kitazawa was up on the second floor, president of the operation. We never talked to him much."

In SNK's final years, following the Japanese tradition of entrusting families to run businesses, the Barone clan were enlisted to manage the US headquarters in San Jose. SNK Japan hired the Barone family to control SNK US. This proved another disaster. Under their misguided leadership, the Barone family ignored the niche US home cart market, completely botched the launch of the Neo-Geo Pocket Color, and did nothing to further arcade sales of the MVS or SNK Photo Systems (which were both awarded to Apple Photo Systems after SNK USA's demise).

SNK's history is as colourful and interesting as a game historian could hope for. Messed-up hardware launches, failed CD add-ons (1992), extreme niche systems (Neo-Geo CDZ/Hyper 64/Crystal System), shady buyouts in Osaka, recurring bankruptcy and eventual blossoming... and so it goes on. This is a tale yet to be fully told.

The collectables

All prices listed here are in US dollars. This is a global market and you are most likely to get the best deal buying directly from an American or Japanese source. Go into a British high street retro/collectors shop and expect to pay a higher premium. Bear in mind most players collect Japanese titles, which are easier to find. Only the most dedicated will attempt to collect the US/Euro release set. Although the games listed here demand very high prices you can obtain many Neo-Geo games for less than a new PS2 title.

The most desirable titles

These are 15 of the most collectable Neo-Geo games

Metal Slug





US Release: $1,900–2,400+
Japanese release: $1,300–1,800+
Genre: action shoot 'em up
Original release: 24/05/96
Developer: Nasca

The original *Metal Slug* was an unexpected hit, hence its low production numbers and subsequent huge value.

Quiz Chibi Maruko-Chan





Japanese release only: $1,000–1,500+
US Release: N/A
Genre: party game
Original release: 26/01/96
Developer: Takara

An extremely rare, if unplayable, title that forms the focal point of any Japanese collection.

Twinkle Star Sprites





Japanese release only: $650–750
Genre: shooting puzzle
Original release: 31/01/97
Developer: ADK

Twinkle Star Sprites was ADK's last game on the Neo. At manufacture ADK ran out of instruction books, so the remainder were supplied with simple photocopies.

Ninja Masters





US release: $900–1,000
Japanese release: $550–650
Genre: 2D fighting
Original release: 28/06/96
Developer: ADK

An extremely sought-after title. Originally released in the wake of *Last Blade*, it attracted little attention due to its similar sword-based ancient Japanese themes.

Blazing Star





Japanese release only: $600–700
US release: N/A
Genre: scrolling shoot 'em up
Original release: 26/02/98
Developer: Yumekobo

A Japanese-only title that is considered by many to be the best Neo-specific shooter.

Pulstar





Japanese release only: $480–$580
Genre: scrolling shoot 'em up
Original release: 29/09/95
Developer: Aicom

An *R-Type*-alike that has come down in value in recent times.

Kizuna Encounter





Euro release: $5,000 estimate
Japanese release: $550–650
Genre: 2D tag fighting
Original release: 08/11/96
Developer: SNK

See main article for details.

Waku Waku 7





Japanese release only: $400–460
Genre: 2D fighter
Original release: 27/12/96
Developer: Sunsoft

The sequel to Sunsoft's *Galaxy Fight* has wonderful music, animation and style. A very sought-after title.

Magical Drop 3





Japanese release only: $400–480
Genre: puzzle
Original Release: 25/04/97
Developer: Data East

This excellent *Tetris/Puzzle Bobble* hybrid released in small Japanese quantities is very desirable.

Metal Slug 2





US Value: $650–700
Genre: action shoot 'em up
Original release: 02/04/98
Developer: SNK

Despite the superior slowdown-free update that is *Metal Slug X*, the original still fetches very high prices for US collectors.

Ultimate 11/ Super Sidekicks 4







Euro release: $2,500–3,000
Japanese release: $475–550
Genre: football
Original Release: 20/12/96
Developer: Snk

Almost as rare as *Kizuna Encounter*, only a handful of this European release survive.

Over Top





Japanese release only: $400–520
Genre: racing
Original Release: 07/08/96
Developer: ADK

An ADK update of its disappointing 1991 top-down racer, *Thrash Rally*. A huge graphical improvement, the game kept the playability of its predecessor – warts and all.

Neo Turf Masters





US release: $700–800+
Japanese release: $400–650
Genre: golf
Original Release: 01/03/96
Developer: Nasca

Released by Nasca very close to *Metal Slug*, this title was largely overlooked until word spread concerning how great it is.

Double Dragon





European release: $500–800
Japanese release: $130–170
Genre: 2D fighter
Original release: 31/03/95
Developer: Technos

The recent confirmation of the Euro version's existence only combined with the recent release of Evoga's *Rage of the Dragons* to keep this cart's value in the stratosphere.

Art of Fighting 3





US release: $280–350
Japanese release: $220–280
Genre: tactical 2D fighter
Original Release: 28/04/96
Developer: SNK

Despite a recent tailing off in value, this remains a collectable game. The huge characters, distinct backdrops and realistic fighting mechanics are not to everyone's tastes, though.

Five of the best-value games

Here are five of the best and most reasonably priced titles any Neo-Geo buyer simply must obtain. As per usual, you'll pay far less for the Japanese version (prices below are all in pounds)

The Last Blade 2





Japanese version: £170–250
Genre: sword-based fighter
Original release: 28/01/99
Developer: SNK

Despite comparisons of the DC port of this game to Sammy's *Guilty Gear X*, the original remains enthralling on the Neo, with deep gameplay.

Garou: Mark of the Wolves





Japanese version: £250–300
Genre: 2D fighter
Original Release: 25/02/00
Developer: SNK

The final installment of the *Fatal Fury* series is undeniably the best. Debate continues to rage as to whether it is the best Neo fighter of all.

Metal Slug 3





Japanese version: £180–220
Genre: Action shoot 'em up
Original release: 01/06/00
Developer: SNK

The biggest, most visually impressive – and cheapest – of the *Metal Slugs*. Shortly to be ported to PS2.

King of Fighters '98





Japanese version: £80–120
Genre: 2D fighter
Original release: 23/09/98
Developer: SNK

The fan's classic. Probably the largest percentage of players rate this as the best of the series so far.

Samurai Shodown II





Japanese release: £25–40
Genre: sword-based fighter
Original release: 02/12/94
Developer: SNK

To many, this game was the first real display of SNK's talent. It is testament to this fact that the game is still highly enjoyable today.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

In **E**116 the publisher and developer details for *Battlefield 1942* were incorrect. The correct information should have read EA and Digital Illusions respectively.

Edge's most played

Metroid

Unlocked in *Prime* (by finishing *Fusion*) this is still rather playable. But it's also a wonderful reminder of how astonishingly far games have come in just 16 years.



[NES] Nintendo

Super Metroid

The *Prime* review couldn't have been done without checking 1994's *Metroid* title. Again. Still a supreme example of game balance, this is unlikely to ever age.



[Super Famicom] Nintendo

Metroid Prime

And having revisited the originals, Retro's achievement becomes all the more apparent. Inconceivably, this is as much of a revelation as its predecessors were.



[GameCube] Nintendo

Metroid Fusion

Yes, Nightmare's a bit of a nightmare, but *Fusion* plays like a dream. In fact the only reasonable criticism is that the hours spent playing *Fusion* eat into *Prime* time.



[Game Boy Advance] Nintendo

The bigger picture

When the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

You may remember the scene from 'Dead Poets Society' where the 'eccentric' teacher played by Robin Williams draws a graph on the chalkboard to demonstrate J Evans Pritchard's method of evaluating poetry. By plotting its perfection along one axis and its importance along the other, the work's true value can be accurately determined. And then ensues a bout of page ripping, suffused with heavy-handed symbology, that only Peter Weir could produce.

Of course, there's no such thing as a perfect game and no ideal system for assessing its value. Every game since *Spacewar!* has had shortcomings, even the mighty *Super Mario 64*. Go back and play Nintendo's most celebrated game and you'll still have your breath taken by the visual fidelity, the sublime structure and the ingenuity on display. You'll also get irate because of the occasional dodgy camera angle. Those who've reached the lofty heights of Tick Tock Clock will know exactly what we mean.

If all things were equal, then a game with glaring technical flaws would score less than a five. There are too many competent games to allow us to turn a blind-eye to those that see the protagonist falling through scenery like David Copperfield through a stage trap. But here's the thing: sometimes, and it doesn't happen that often, a game emerges that delivers gameplay which transcends its technical frailties. *The Getaway* is one such title.

It was always going to be a case of squeezing a quart into a pint pot. *The Getaway* has framerate issues, the vehicle handling is best described as basic, and once on foot things take a turn for the brainless. But Sony's latest game still has the ability to impress and engage. It's all too easy to join the game's anti-hype brigade by taking any one of the game's components apart, but *The Getaway*'s whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts.

The debate over whether objective measures can be used to evaluate creative endeavours is a much bigger philosophical question, and one that is never likely to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. But, for the record, **Edge** believes that applying cold empirical guidelines when reviewing games is as problematic as taking a wholly subjective line. Ultimately, we have to use our collective experience and focus on the aspect that counts most in a videogame: whether it's fun or not.







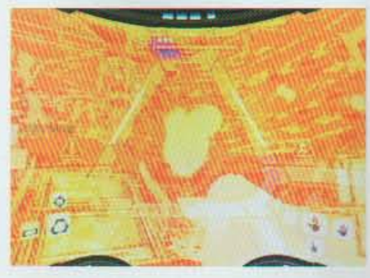


Metroid Prime

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Retro Studios/Nintendo** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), March (UK)**







Prime is so polished you can see Samus' face in it (right). The thermal visor allows the detection of enemies in lightless environments (above)



Edge will admit it had its doubts. When news first broke that Nintendo had handed over the development duties of a new instalment for one of its most revered franchises to an out-house studio only a select few had heard of, eyebrows were raised. When news arrived that Austin-based Retro Studios would be working on an FPS, brows and hands made audible contact. And when, at E3 2001, Shigeru Miyamoto publicly stated that the expected playable demo had been withheld due to personal concerns relating to the control dynamic, alarm bells rang and our expectations were the subject of a dramatic re-evaluation.

"Deconstructing the layout and deciphering clues left in the design by the developer to find routes to a new room is an absolute joy"

Turns out we should have had a little more faith in Nintendo's decision and been a little more confident in Retro's ability.

You get an idea of *Prime*'s quality early on: the moment Samus steps off her craft and onto the docking platform of a space station from which a distress signal has been sent, inquisitive gamers will quickly realise the game of *Asteroids* that can be had by shooting the space rocks floating about in the atmosphere-deprived environment. It's a promising start and a strong indication of kind of level of detail and distinction of the proceedings that you can expect the game to deliver.

In typical Nintendo fashion you're led through the controls even before you've made it inside the station. For instance, the scan visor's fundamental function becomes apparent – entering a new room and scrutinizing your environment before you do anything else soon becomes second nature (and it needs to as some elements, like bosses, you only get to meet once – see Analyse this). As does the control system, fo that matter. Initially, the notion of holding down the left shoulder button in order to strafe, and having to manually engage your vertical view axis (by pressing the right shoulder button) feels awkward. In practice



Baby Sheegoths can still freeze you with their dying breath (above). One of many great touche









You get to shoot enemies, of course, but *Prime* remains true to its platforming roots – those expecting all-out action are going to be bitterly disappointed. This doesn't play like standard FPSs. And that's because it isn't supposed to

things settle down quicker than you expect and your first encounter with a space pirate reveals that, thankfully, the developer has included a lock-on option when it comes to opponents. This is typical Nintendo, borrowing an element from one of its other games – in this case a thirdperson action RPG – and successfully applying it to essentially fulfil a similar role under altogether different circumstances. If there is one criticism it would be that at times locating enemies at the higher end of the Y-axis can prove tricky but thankfully those are rare moments – for the most part it's a system that works in wonderfully rewarding and fluid fashion.

In addition to the tutorial purpose it serves, this initial level also teases the player by offering a taste of the diversity of Samus' arsenal only to cruelly take the toys away just as you make it out of the derelict station alive (*Super Metroid* players won't miss the parallel with that game's own opening few minutes – indeed, although not strictly the official sequel (Fusion, on p82, holds that honour) much in *Prime* references Samus' 16bit adventure).

Touching down on a nearby planet, the game then really begins. Initial excursions are short, limited by Samus' non-enhanced repertoire of actions. It doesn't take long to come across an impassable obstacle which requires equipment you have yet to acquire. A couple of early power-ups are quickly found (their 'timing' as expertly calculated as that of *Super Metroid*'s) and you soon begin to stray farther from your craft's landing zone. Before long an anal retentive's nightmare scenario has developed with a bewildering number of unfinished sections branching off in all directions on the map. But then this is the very nuance of the *Metroid* titles: the constant wandering; the detailed analysing of the environment; imagining the possibilities… Deconstructing the layout and deciphering clues left in the design by the developer to find possible routes to a new room or some



Route finder

Metroid Prime's map is glorious, easily one of the finest examples to date. In 3D, it's easily rotated and magnified for those moments when you really can't see the doorway that you swear is supposed to be there. As in previous *Metroid* titles, it is possible to download the area layout from a map room (showing unvisited rooms as light blue rather than orange), but rather than hand everything to you on a plate, the developer has wisely included secret areas that only show up once you've discovered them, adding to the already rather substantial game area *Prime* offers players.



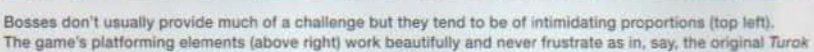












Bosses don't usually provide much of a challenge but they tend to be of intimidating proportions (top left). The game's platforming elements (above right) work beautifully and never frustrate as in, say, the original *Turok*

Analyse this

Another layer on to an already wonderfully rich play mechanic is the use of your scan visor which uncovers vital clues or information about your progress – indeed, denouement is achieved mainly through reading space pirate data log entries. Completists will revel in the way you're encouraged to scan everything – from new enemies to health pick-ups. Successful data entries are archived so you get an idea of the level of your scanning performance.

secret area is an absolute joy and what makes games like, for instance, the original *Tomb Raider*, so rewarding (although Samus' versatility together with technical advancements in console technology ensure that by comparison Lara's world now feels restrictive and predictable but in essence the principle remains much the same). The excitement of acquiring a power-up that finally unlocks progress to new areas of the map never diminishes – and it's what ensures that although you're guided as to what your next move should be, you rarely pay immediate attention to this, choosing instead to embark on exploratory missions to see how far your new gadget will take you, what new locales you'll discover. Only when you have exhausted the possibilities do you continue as instructed.

Metroid virgins might think this constant toing and froing dull, though that has never been a problem for a game series that traditionally has never failed to be anything other than exquisitely paced – just as you're getting familiar with your role within the environment, a new toy unlocks and you're off on another exhilarating ride.

In *Prime*, the developer essentially delivers an FPP, not an FPS. Regardless of how much input Nintendo may have had during the development, Retro clearly understands the *Metroid* games: this offers an experience that remains uncommonly pure and true to the series' platforming etho despite also dramatically reworking the perspective from which the action is viewed And with no sign of suffering the repercussions it would be reasonable to expect such a move would introduce. Maintaining the essence of the franchise aft this substantial transition is in itself highly impressive, but to also ensure the game dynamic remains intact is a staggering achievement. After *Ocarina of Time* and *Super Mario 64*, this is possibly the most accomplished three dimensional update of a 2D title **Edge** has witnessed. It is seamless.

> "After Ocarina of Time and Super Mario 64 this is possibly the most accomplished three dimensional update **Edge** has witnessed"

The sensation of familiarity, the kind that you only really get from Nintendo sequels, is sensational – you'd expect the change of perspective to completely alter the way you feel within *Prime*'s world yet this isn't the case. The *Metroid* environment has been so faithfully recreated that within minutes of starting the game everything feels exactly the way you'd expect it to.

And that's because as with all *Metroid* instalments this is essentially the same game, albeit this time it happens to also be masterfully updated for a new generation. The same atmosphere, the same pace, the same delicate balance. The same utterly astonishing experience.

Edge rating: **Nine** out of **ten**



Often, *Prime*'s world looks as beautiful as it sounds (particularly in Pro Logic II). The fabulously controllable morph ball: half-pipe trickery for accessing higher levels (bottom right); a *Monkey Ball* moment (middle right); ball-specific levels adopt a side-on perspective (top right); and Spider ball can climb magnetic rails

Metroid Fusion

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





You'll encounter many different types of energy organisms (top). Bosses come in many different forms. This fellow (above) is surprisingly orthodox

It's not difficult to find great software on the GBA. What's more tricky is finding something worth playing that isn't a simple SNES conversion. It's refreshing, then, to see the likes of *Yoshi's Island* followed by this, a full-blown follow-up to the seminal SNES title of 1994 (as the intro sequence discreetly informs the player, *Fusion* is *Metroid IV*)

Having been caught up in a not-entirely predictable spot of bother, gameplay begins with you stripped of the manifold assets accrued during Samus Aran's last adventure. So you begin with no spin attack. Your beam weapon borders on pathetic. And you can't even jump while in 'ball' mode.

If these details have no relevance to you, then it's worth briefly touching upon the *Metroid* series' premise. It's about growth: you begin with a limited selection of powers which can be dramatically upgraded via a process of exploration and linear development. In this respect the games

"It's about growth: you begin with a limited selection of powers which can be vastly upgraded via a process of exploration"

have a lot in common with Nintendo's *Zelda* games: you'll often encounter a section whose intricacies demand a skill you've not yet acquired and, after an amount of head scratching, you'll move on to what appears to be a further challenge, returning later to explore that previously inaccessible nook or cranny.

If you *are* familiar with the *Metroid* premise, *Fusion* will appear just that: familiar. Seven areas exist (a central section plus six separate lower divisions, each a part of a giant space station) through which you manoeuvre, encountering bosses at fairly regular intervals.

The transition to the small screen does little to dull the series' appeal – although, predictably, many areas certainly benefit from the addition of a decent extra light source – and the developers at NCL deliver a sparkling selection of backgrounds that rarely remind you that the host machine's colour palette runs to just 256 hues. Subtle touches are everywhere. Which is more than can be said of some of the routine enemy sprites which, especially in their larger incarnations, can appear jarringly crude.

Visually the game crescendos with some of the most evilly elaborate boss characters





The main spaceship map (top) shows six lower levels, and this is where the lion's share of the action takes place. *Fusion* introduces cut-scenes (above)



Samus's ship (top right) will be a welcome sight for those familiar with the series. Elsewhere, the heroine uses a speed-run and offers an unusual amount of respect for indigenous lifeforms

you've seen on a handheld console. From serpent-like nasties to altogether more otherwordly specimens, *Fusion* presents a horrific line-up. And they aren't just ugly: some of these bosses are plain nightmares.

And these encounters sit quite uneasily with the rest of the game, because exploring new areas and then encountering and overcoming their indigenous lifeforms is rarely a taxing pursuit. Progressing between bosses can be quite a trundle, in fact (so long as you respect what the game's all about – that is: never leave any stone unbombed, always look at the map for evidence of a potential secret passageway, etc). And then they kick in: there are at least three major one-on-one conflicts that'll have you near to pulling your hair out.

But then this is a Nintendo GBA game, not just another crappy film tie-in that you could beat simply by hammering B and A while simultaneously ordering a pizza. Like the aforementioned *Yoshi* title, *Fusion* is a beguiling experience, not only because it mostly looks the part but because it makes you take it seriously. It's simply not worth bothering with unless you're willing to put in a significant amount of effort.

Which is an interesting point when you consider that most *Metroid* vets should finish the game within about six hours of play time. A newcomer could probably add another hour or two to that, but this nevertheless remains a quite brief experience.

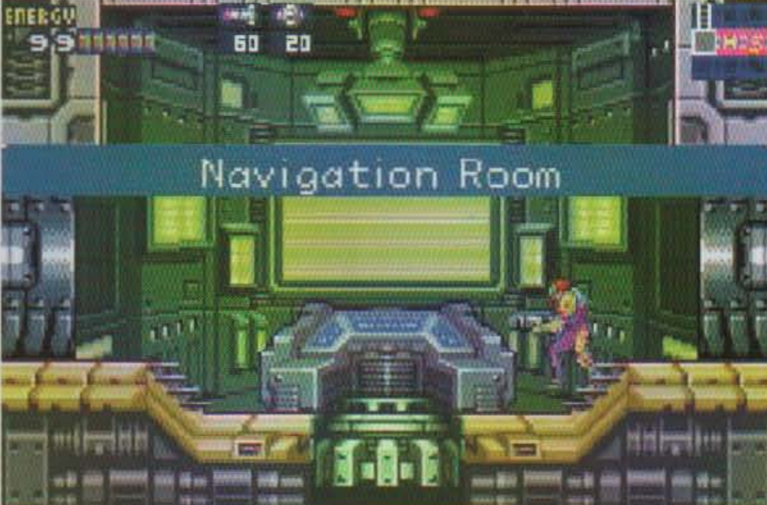
Completing the game allows you to link up with GameCube *Metroid Prime* in order to

Previously in E113, E116



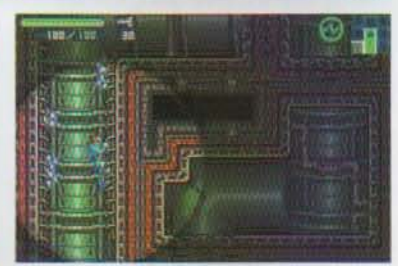








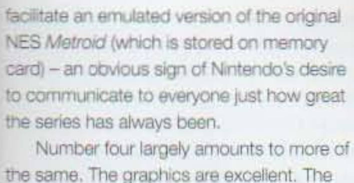




Navigation Rooms (main) are crucial elements: you'll head for them after completing every major task. Hanging from ceilings (above left) is all in a day's work. Some areas do not offer general light sources (above right), resulting in ranged illumination. This does not present too many problems, however

facilitate an emulated version of the original NES *Metroid* (which is stored on memory card) – an obvious sign of Nintendo's desire to communicate to everyone just how great the series has always been.

Number four largely amounts to more of the same. The graphics are excellent. The audio accompaniment does its job – particularly in terms of a raft of swooshy sound effects. But the spooky, ominous atmosphere of the last instalment, on the SNES, just isn't there. Maybe it's simply the delivery mechanism. Maybe it's something more fundamental than that. Whatever the case, though, this is still another great GBA title from Nintendo of Japan.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



LOAD "" CODE

So you're stripped of the many exceptional abilities you acquired in your last mission via *Super Metroid*? Then you'll have to rely on the computer geeks and their system to, first, formulate them once more and, second, make them available for download.

Needless to say, relying on outside sources for progression can be a bind. Perhaps that's why certain upgrades can be achieved by less obvious means. (In other words, don't be surprised to pick things up from places other than download points.)

The Getaway

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (Team Soho)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





Oddly, there doesn't appear to be a way to call up an in-game map, meaning those with a working knowledge of London's streets will have a definite advantage

Where to begin? It has been such a long time since **E**89's first look, and that time has been filled with predictions and assumptions. But, perhaps because of Team Soho's grand claims and financial backing, the rumours have been malicious, laced with a knowing smile and plenty of delicious schadenfreude. Maybe you'll have heard that the actual cost of making the game was far in excess of the officially stated £3m; maybe that, as soon as the team glimpsed *GTAIII*, the whole project went back to the design stage. Put simply, *The Getaway* has been the unwitting butt of an industry joke for about two years now, and it's time we wrote a punchline with some substance.

To begin with, *The Getaway* is not *GTAIII*, it's *Driver*. A series of 12 missions take you through a story in which you play ex-con Mark Hammond. Complete those, and you're rewarded with another 12, this time giving you control of renegade cop DC Carter. The stories interweave, although the delicacy with which this is handled is somewhat crippled by the script, more of which later. Completing Carter's missions provides a Free Roam mode, which is still nothing like *GTAIII*, merely offering the chance to explore Team Soho's London at something approaching your own pace.

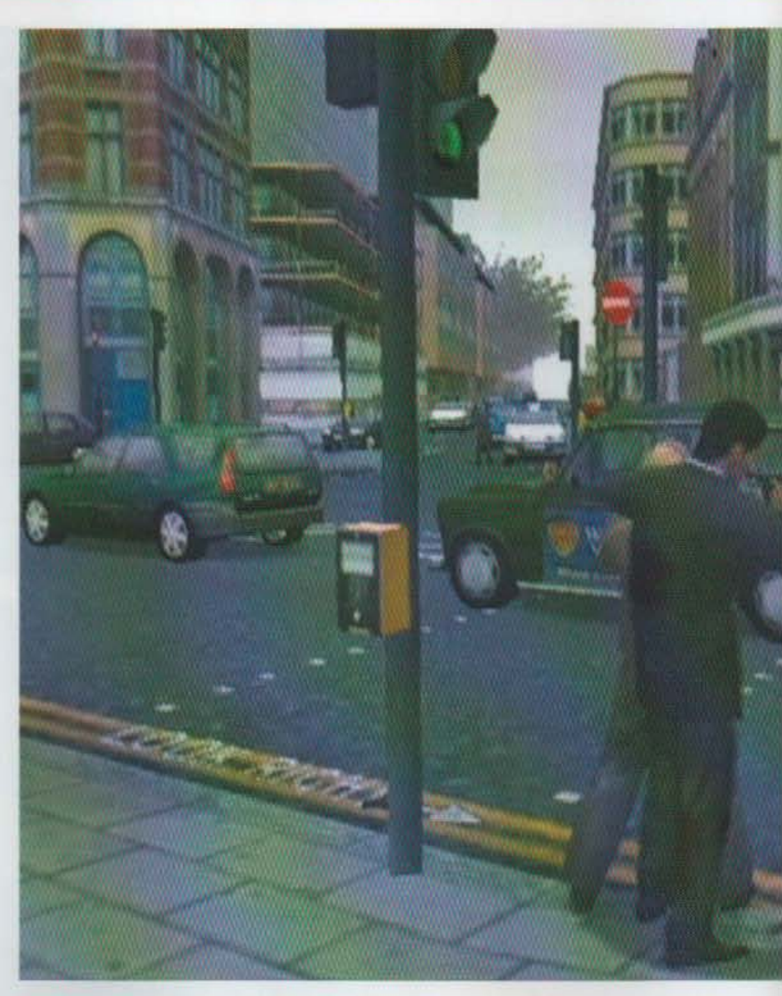
"The Getaway is technically superlative. The question has always been whether it's any fun, and those fears can be allayed too"



The driving sections are enjoyable, if a little too simple. Completing each mission from behind the wheel is a question of determination rather than skill

Missions are split into two or three sections, at least one of which will be the increasingly fraught journey to a specified location, and one that will be the thirdperson shooting when you arrive. Driving is where the *GTA* comparisons are most appropriate, since the pattern is approximately the same: you steal a car, drive it fast, drive it into something, repeat the last two steps until the car breaks, then get out and steal another. Control is fine, damage is well implemented, and it all looks and feels excellent. But these sections are also absurdly easy, since the police's intent on catching you levels out very quickly, and driving from A to B becomes less a battle of skill, more a war of attrition.

Outside the car, predictable problems appear immediately. The camera is irritating, offering no manual control on the right stick, and contriving to twist in directions that might well be cinematic, but aren't necessarily conducive to seeing the guy who's shooting you in the chest. That's exacerbated by the autolock, which, while occasionally inane, generally locks you on the most dangerous enemy, and makes combat more like a rudimentary *Dead to Rights* than *Grand Theft Auto*. This is a good thing, clearly, since extra-vehicle combat is certainly *GTAIII*'s weakest aspect, but it's still an unsubtle, and mostly unrewarding, method of fighting. Later levels have simple stealth aspects, which work reasonably well. The sections where you have to roll under laser tripwires are less successful, being a ludicrous example of archaic game design, particularly given the unpredictable nature of the camera.



There aren't any health packs or related items in the game, but if our villainous hero can find a wall to lean against, not only does his body heal itself, but his suit washes clean of those stubborn stains

This bit is important. Sony has stated that *The Getaway* is a step towards some mythical future entertainment medium, that it goes further than any videogame has gone before. It is right, but perhaps not always in the way it had anticipated. First, *The Getaway*'s cinematic ambitions are impaired by the script, which is nothing short of abysmal. It is credit to some of the actors involved that they manage to turn what they've been instructed to say into somethin[g] approaching dialogue, but it's still far below what you'd expect from the weakest piece o[f] straight-to-video cinema. It lacks direction, realism and focus. It's comical.

Second, behind all the mockney swearing and try-hard torture, *The Getaway* is morally repugnant, rotten to the core. Hammond is a dull, colourless thug, and the writers' lack of craft means that the only

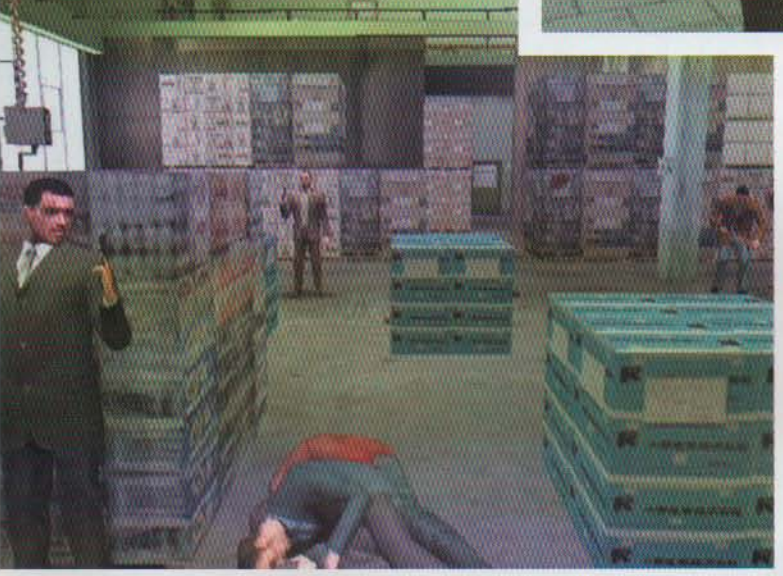
Previously in E69, E112, E118





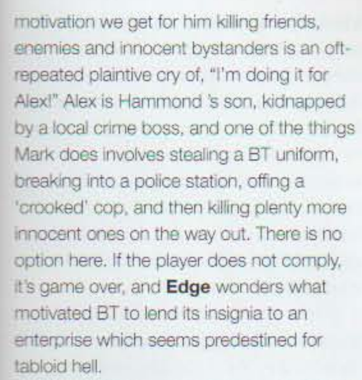


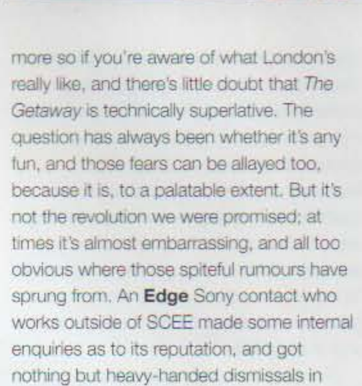












motivation we get for him killing friends, enemies and innocent bystanders is an oft-repeated plaintive cry of, "I'm doing it for Alex!" Alex is Hammond 's son, kidnapped by a local crime boss, and one of the things Mark does involves stealing a BT uniform, breaking into a police station, offing a 'crooked' cop, and then killing plenty more innocent ones on the way out. There is no option here. If the player does not comply, it's game over, and **Edge** wonders what motivated BT to lend its insignia to an enterprise which seems predestined for tabloid hell.

Still, for those who aren't worried about the direction that Team Soho is trying to take gaming in, riding around (an empty, '28 Days Later'-style) London is jolly good fun, even more so if you're aware of what London's really like, and there's little doubt that *The Getaway* is technically superlative. The question has always been whether it's any fun, and those fears can be allayed too, because it is, to a palatable extent. But it's not the revolution we were promised; at times it's almost embarrassing, and all too obvious where those spiteful rumours have sprung from. An **Edge** Sony contact who works outside of SCEE made some internal enquiries as to its reputation, and got nothing but heavy-handed dismissals in return. The sad thing is that everyone wants to hate *The Getaway*, and, whatever its faults, it deserves better than that.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The game's approach to dialogue appears to be simple: if they're police, add background static; if they're not, make them use 'adult' language

Ghost town



Clearly the most visible flaw in Team Soho's London is the lack of people – players rarely witness more than a dozen at once – but there aren't enough cars either, though proper congestion recreation would make for a poor game. Other concessions include the absence of smaller sideroads and alleys, and generic licence-defeating shopfronts, which mask some specific places **Edge** tried to find. Still, it's a phenomenal achievement to get an environment this big this close to its inspiration, particularly with no en-route loading.

Shinobi

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Overworks** Price: **$50 (£30)** Release: **Out now (US), January (UK)**







Although the style and philosophy of *Shinobi* is entirely faithful to the game's 2D predecessors, Joe Musashi is only available as a playable character after enough secret tokens have been found

Like Nintendo, Sega has been busy updating one of its classic 8/16bit franchises, and it has managed to steer clear of simply producing a slavish update. Indeed it's a mark of the company's achievement that it has revived memories without being suffocated by them, and resuscitated an old-skool development philosophy without producing a game that feels dated. And above all, *Shinobi* is a game that affords players the opportunity to feel very, very cool, as they string together elaborate death-dealing combos and negotiate treacherous environments at high speed.

Once again, we're back in the realm of the nonsensical plot, featuring supernatural forces, soul-eating swords, and a clash of the old and new as antiquated rivalries explode against the high-rise backdrop of a vaguely futuristic Tokyo. Thus it is that Oboro clan leader Hotsuma finds himself faced with the reanimated corpses of his clansmen, "determined to avenge the death of his clan." Which turns out to be an entirely appropriate introduction to the action, since this B-movie-infused sense of style is one of the game's chief strengths. Hotsuma looks imposing just standing still, but he can also scale walls and dispatch several enemies at once with a dramatic Tate move (see Akujiki power).

Granted, the game doesn't stand out graphically in conventional terms – notwithstanding cut-scenes, which are beautifully realised. Textures and environments aren't exactly breathtaking, for example, but this isn't a game about the joy of exploring intricately detailed environments, it's a game about the visceral thrill of overcoming enemies with easy aplomb. Like its predecessors, this game requires, via a steep difficulty curve and various unlockable extras, that you play through environments repeatedly – they're not designed to be seen and enjoyed once, they merely provide a functional backdrop for frenetic action.

"Aerial combos frequently occur above lava-filled pits or sudden-death drops, as well as presenting a means to reach difficult ledges"

And though that action is undeniably simple, it's entirely engrossing. After the initial stages of the game, Hotsuma's sword, Akujiki, provides perpetual impetus; if you don't claim enough souls, it will begin to claim his, adding an urgent incentive to speedy progress. Consequently, Hotsuma's stealth dash proves an essential skill to master in order to avoid enemies and attack their weak spots. It's also an essential component of aerial combos, which frequently occur above lava-filled pits or sudden-death drops, as well as presenting a means to reach difficult-to-access ledges and walls. Which is just as well, since efficient routes will have to be quickly worked out in order to reach the boss that awaits at the end of every level.

Ranging from giant spiders, demonic moths and snake-spewing weathermen, these are universally spectacular, providing an effective coda to each stage and a demanding test of skills learned over the course of the game. Sure, some bosses are a test of tenacity rather than skill, which will no doubt deter all but the most determined gamers. But while an indisputable degree of harshness inevitably produces bottlenecks that can only be beaten with perseverance, the ease with which early levels can be replayed is a sign that progress is no random feat, but in fact reliant on the mastery of all of Hotsuma's actions. And it's the challenge of achieving this mastery that underpins the satisfaction offered by *Shinobi*.

It isn't a game that boasts universal appeal and it's certainly not perfect. Nevertheless, this is a solidly entertaining title, and ample justice for a fondly remembered franchise.

Edge rating: Seven out of te



The game's eight stages consist of a couple of levels each, and they all build up to impressive boss encounters, boasting authentically retro levels of difficulty. Judiciously executed Tate actions are us[ually] the key to success; but they're more easily said than done, and frequently require several attempts



Successful execution of Tate moves are rewarded with quick cut-scenes that add to the overall sense of stylish cool

Previously in E111, E112, E113, E117

















Akujiki power

The game's central mechanic is the Tate action. By dispatching several enemies in quick succession, Hotsuma can perform a Tate move, which is rewarded by a stylish cut-scene and an increased amount of Yin with which to feed the voracious Akujiki sword. It also increases the efficacy of Hotsuma's subsequent attacks, proving an essential skill to master if later levels and bosses are to be overcome, and by the end of the game players will have had to master the art of stealthily and speedily dashing round enemies to destroy them.





In addition to the bloodthirsty Akujiki sword, players have a variety of attacks at their disposal, including ninjutsu magic and shurikens, though the latter don't seem to be as effective as they were in the heady days of the Master System and the Mega Drive

Resident Evil 0

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), March 2003 (UK)** Previously in **E**112

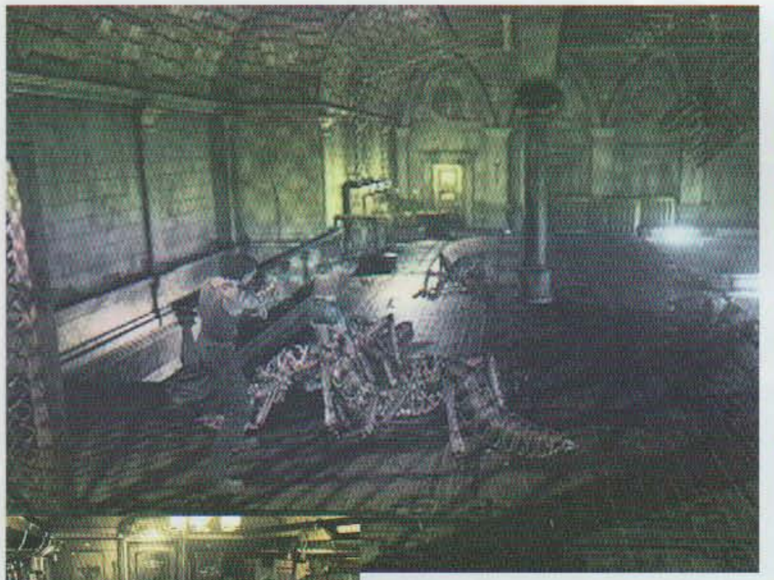
First, a word of warning: this game contains prerendered backdrops, loading screens between each area, convoluted riddles, pedantic inventory management and an overcomplicated plot. It also features a control scheme that is essentially the same as that used in previous *Resident Evil* games. So those gamers who remain nonplussed by the *Resident Evil* formula and alienated by its control scheme will find little here to persuade them that they've misjudged the entire series. But for those who don't have any irrational aversions to the formula, this prequel is another elegantly composed example.

Granted, the two major introductions – switching between two characters and the abolition of item boxes – do little to distinguish this from previous titles. Despite the absence of item boxes, inventory management remains a crucial component to progress, and you'll still have to backtrack to pick up items. Meanwhile, the necessity of switching between the game's protagonists (rookie cop, Rebecca Chambers and escaped convict, Billy Coen) is so well executed and so seamlessly integrated that it barely feels like a departure for the series. And likewise, though the backgrounds are stunningly depicted, complete with atmospheric detail such as curtains that ruffle in the wind, they do little to distinguish themselves from the GameCube version of *Resident Evil* in terms of technical quality.

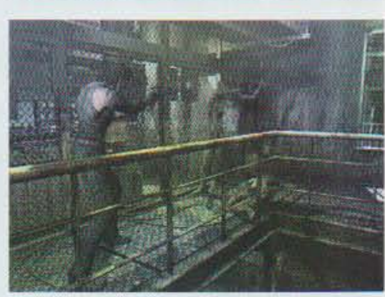
But it's worth pointing out that there are several reasons for the popularity of one of Capcom's flagship franchises. And *Resident Evil 0* maintains all of these hallmark features, such as a measured balance between intellectual challenges and instinctual ones, or the gradual, revelatory exploration. Like a videogame case study of Ockham's razor in action, *Resident Evil 0* demands that players strip away layers of geographical superfluity in order to follow an essentially linear path from beginning to end, imparting a sublimely poised rhythm to the pace of discovery.

And it's equally worth pointing out that just matching the technical excellence of the original GameCube *Resident Evil* is certainly no shortcoming; *Resident Evil 0* is a beautiful game – breathtakingly so at times. Indeed the game is every bit the equal of its GameCube predecessor, and one of its great strengths is the manner in which it treads familiar ground, yet remains fundamentally engaging – a considerable achievement in itself.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**









As with every previous *Resident Evil* title, completing the game unlocks additional costumes, as well as an entertaining subgame

Holy narrative!

Each new chapter in the *Resident Evil* series has introduced a hatful of tortuous plot twists and unlikely narrative convolutions. *Resident Evil 0* doesn't disappoint, introducing James Marcus as another co-founder of Umbrella (to join Spencer and Ashford), and adding more confusing details of the various viruses (T-Virus, G-Virus, Progenitor Virus, etc) that have featured so far. It also raises several questions (for example, is Billy innocent?) – but then, internal narrative consistency has never been the prerequisite of a good B-movie, or indeed a B-movie-flavoured videogame.







Although a few familiar faces and features make a return appearance, Capcom has also seen fit to introduce several new elements, including an expanded and predominantly aquatic bestiary

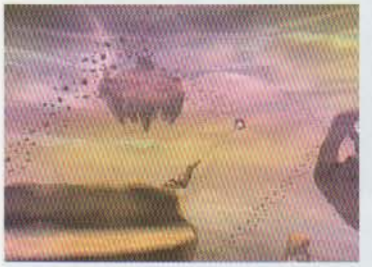
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Tecmo Developer: In-house Price: $50 (£32) Release: Out now (US), TBC (UK)

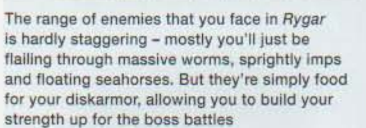
Previously in E111, E113










The range of enemies that you face in *Rygar* is hardly staggering – mostly you'll just be flailing through massive worms, sprightly imps and floating seahorses. But they're simply food for your diskarmor, allowing you to build your strength up for the boss battles




Rygar's scenery is gorgeous, pretty enough to question why more game designers haven't taken advantage of this era. Middle Earth and space are all well and good but sometimes Edge just feels like smashing a Minotaur's face in

Were this your first glimpse of *Rygar* – were you not already aware of its plac in gaming's history – you'd be forgiven for thinking that it's a new Capcom franchise to accompany *Onimusha* and *Devil May Cry* on their sequential roads to financial security. All the company signatures are there: there's the luscious, static scenery; the upgradeable weapons; the cannon fodder that builds your stats before a boss fight. Actually, it's just as close to the later *Final Fantasys*, narrower in scope but more thrilling in an instant.

Tracing a path through fictional ancient history, taking in Aristotle, Cleopatra and all manner of gods, the story's essence can be stripped down to a simple enough premise: save the princess. Rygar is a soldier who specialises in using frisbee-style discs as impressively destructive weaponry. During the course of the game he collects three 'diskarmors', each of which carries a differen elemental spirit – sea, fire or wind – and allows special moves and combos when equipped. Combos are simple rhythmic patterns of circle and X, while specials call forth spirits of the diskarmor to fight on Rygar's side, like *Final Fantasy*'s guardians.

Another *FF*-ism: each disc can be equipped with up to four magical stones, which are hidden around the beautifully illustrated universe. The stones change attac and defence powers, or add special moves, or modify the weapon's effects, and finding them all is what will bring players back to *Rygar* after they've completed the game on the hardest of its difficulty settings. They also provide a way of balancing the game, since i a boss is proving too difficult, a side quest to find a useful stone may help immeasurably.

That's what *Rygar* is all about, of course – the bosses. Sure, there's memorable stuff elsewhere; the way rocks crumble into dust when your diskarmor strikes home, or the intricate way the levels curl into themselves, new areas opening up in old locations as Rygar learns to use his diskarmor as a means of transportation. Sometimes the path to the end through increasingly hard mythological enemies appears all too obvious, too linear, too tiring, and gamers may start to question quite why they're stomping around killing small worms before being strong enough to tackle bigger ones. But the smoke and mirrors mostly works, and *Rygar* provides an absorbing half-dozen hours of hit and myth adventure.

Fought for food

Just like *Onimusha*, *Rygar* features a full-on fighting subquest. Returning to one location in the lava-ridden mountains and triggering a switch reveals a hole in the ground, through which lies level upon level of diskarmor fodder. Each subsequent level offers a tougher challenge, increasingly hardy enemies spawning and respawning until you're at the very brink of death. And when you think you can't take any more, you can run to the surface in the blink of an eye – but you won't be rewarded for it.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Sly Raccoon

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCCE Developer: Sucker Punch Price: £40 Release: January 2003 Previously in E113, E118

Moving platforms, disintegrating platforms, enemy sequences, alarm sequences, shiny objects to collect. It seems as long as there are consoles there will be platform games collapsing back on the same old stock elements. While the likes of *Jak and Daxter* and *Ratchet & Clank* have tried to advance this genre, merging platforming with action adventure, *Sly Raccoon* has no other ambition than to be a polished, traditional title. It is *Crash Bandicoot*. And just like *Crash*, it's a lot of fun. Because instead of forward-looking ambition, you get well-trodden gameplay competently delivered in a densely packed, cel-shaded comic world.

You play Sly, latest in a long line of famed raccoon gentleman thieves. When the family's book of stealing techniques – 'The Thievius Raccoonus' – is stolen by five criminals, you must travel to their domains and climb, jump and run through several platform stages. On the way, you collect coins (100 provides a lucky horseshoe which absorbs one point of damage) and bottles (30-40 will unlock new moves). Sly can also double jump and hit enemies or catch hold of hooks with his stick.

And that's that. **Edge** could be describing any post-*Mario* platform game. But despite the atavistic nature of the gameplay, there are some neat touches. A few levels take the form of races or shooting challenges to break up the platforming, and the bosses all have quirks – one (Ms Ruby the voodoo alligator) even challenges you to a *PaRappa*-style rhythm action face-off.

The locations are very nicely designed too: from the swamps of Haiti to a brash Las Vegas-style gambling city. All are packed with peripheral detail, and have real depth and good three-dimensional structure – often you see sections above, below and far off in the distance that are yet to be tackled. Surprises keep coming, too. On the China level, you strike fireworks to reveal coins – but this also sets the fireworks off, giving you a short, but colourful display. Little touches, but worth so much when you're in such familiar territory.

Sly Raccoon, then, gets all the basics right. The camera – the bane of most 3D platformers – behaves well, allowing a lot of player rotation and rarely putting you in danger by panning away at crucial moments. It's not difficult, but there is replay value (see Sly organisation). For PS2 owners wanting a good-looking stroll down memory lane, this is engaging for the most part.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







This visually overpowering scene is from the final world. It takes a few minutes to pick out a safe route. Enjoyably brain-teasing stuff

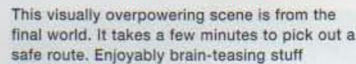






The game mixes traditional platform challenges, such as perfectly timed and accurate jumps, with fun mini-games. The dirt-track race in the second world (above right) is a good example





Sly organisation

Each of the five bosses in the game has their own realm based in a different part of the world. These realms have a central hub with usually seven stages coming off which you can tackle in any order. The game lets you go back to any stage at any time to collect clue bottles and learn new moves. You can also go back and sneakily stock up on lives and horseshoes. It's a nice open system, which, when the baddies start getting frustratingly hard to beat, stops you going insane. Getting beat? Just stock up and go.

Unreal Championship

Format: Xbox Publisher: Infogrames Developer: Digital Extremes/Epic Games Price: £40 Release: Out now Previously in E107, E112









Weapons range from the basic (assault rifle) to the nasty (rocket launcher). The zoom facility on the lightning gun is particularly pleasing



Terrahawks

In the singleplayer game of *Unreal Championship* you'll be taunted by your enemies in a strangled bronchial tone that resembles a cross between Stephen Hawking and Zelda from 'Terrahawks'. **Edge** suspects (hopes) that the effect is intentional and will mimic your own voice once it's been distorted by the effect of travelling through a broadband pipe.





The adrenaline counter (top right of the screen) makes it into this Xbox version. Reach 100 and you can enter special states such as berserk



If the singleplayer aspect of *Unreal Championship* is anything to go by, then Xbox Live is in trouble. Arena combat games are hardly the most difficult to design – sure, there's weapon balancing and buddy AI to take into consideration – but it's been done so many times before that you would hope a decent effort could be achieved after so much time in development.

It should be stated here that this is a review of the singleplayer game only. Unfortunately, the infrastructure is still not available to play *Unreal Championship* across the Xbox Live service, but you can expect an updated review when the online component is up and running. While it may seem a little unfair to focus on this bot-only version, there's enough evidence to suggest that it's hardly going to sell Microsoft's online dream to the masses.

One of the main problems is a framerate that has a tendency to lurch at crucial moments in the game. This is most apparent when you encounter several opponents onscreen at the same time. While it's never bad enough to spoil the overall sense of speed and freneticism it doesn't auger well for the Xbox Live-enabled version. True, *Unreal Championship* bears a good deal of resemblance to *Unreal Tournament 2003* (**E**117), with the addition of a few extra areas, but the same technical excellence and sheen just isn't there.

The usual mix of games is available: Deathmatch, Survival, Capture the Flag, plus the moderately entertaining Bombing Run, in which players must score a point by shooting a ball through a goal, but there's nothing here that hasn't been done better in other arena games. Compared to the imaginative challenges and multiplayer games in *TimeSplitters2*, *Unreal Championship* falls far short. The bots respond competently for the most part, but sometimes fail to convince you that they are under any kind of guidance whatsoever. It's an average experience that's unlikely to impress anyone who's already played against better bots in other games. And through the multiplayer System Link options things only improve moderately.

Of course, playing online, with the voice communicator enabled (see Terrahawks) could transform the experience. **Edge** hopes that Digital Extremes has saved the best until last for UK gamers.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Battle Engine Aquila

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Lost Toys** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**107, **E**111

On the surface at least, *Battle Engine Aquila* bears some resemblance to Rage's enjoyable *Gun Metal* (**E**111). Both games have an emphasis on big guns, large explosions and frighteningly large boss encounters. There's also the fact that both have a craft that can alter between land and air combat, adding considerable strategical depth to the shoot 'em up dynamic. But there the comparisons must end, because Lost Toys' mech title displays a polish that was missing from its closest spiritual rival.

Indeed, for such a modest UK development house the game exudes a confidence and attention to detail that can match anything coming out of Japan. The high production values are only let down by the risible cut-scenes, complete with poor lip-synching and stock Russian accents, which do little to dispel less desirable stereotypes about videogames.

From the very first mission, *Battle Engine Aquila* wins you over with its immediacy. Although there are few shades of grey in the game – the player's forces (the Forseti) are blue, the enemy's (the Muspell) red – the design has clearly been tailored to deliver all-out action that leaves you with no time to dwell on plot or morality. This is an old-skool shoot 'em up dynamic that's been gracefully translated into a 3D arena. The weapon effects are powerful, the explosions satisfying and the pacing well honed.

But *Battle Engine Aquila* fails to deliver enough variety to make it a classic. Too many missions involve destroying the same unit types over and over again within the framework of similar objectives. This wouldn't be so noticeable if there was more tactical nuance to the game, but the broad sweep promised in early previews simply isn't there. The notion that you could direct the flow of battle is only marginally touched upon. Mostly, it's obvious which units to take out first (usually those closest to your forces) and this is underlined by mission updates from your HQ that prompt you in a given direction.

Despite this, the frenetic and compelling nature of the combat never makes you feel that things are getting too repetitive, and the occasional surprise (see Mega boss) and branching structure will have you coming back for more. Although it doesn't quite have the epic feel **Edge** had hoped for *Battle Engine Aquila* will thrill those addicted to carnal destruction.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Mega boss

Get through the ranks of armour divisions and gun turrets and on certain missions you will be faced with one of the game's extraordinary bosses. Although each can be taken out by finding an Achilles' heel, it's the scale of these behemoths that really impresses. Watching as they disappear into a crumbling heap is terrifically satisfying.







Aquila is extremely allergic to water and in certain missions it's necessary to hop from one craft to another (right). Weapons are selected by pressing the left trigger and it's vital to use the deformable nature of your craft to maximise destruction. The PS2 version of *Battle Engine Aquila* promises to offer a near-identical experience

Mini Moni Shakkato Tambourine

Format: **PSone** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team** Price: **¥9,800 (£51)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**













Shake arrows can be substantially more complex than basic arc or V shapes. Expectedly, there's a certain tactile thrill to come from tracking an erratic zig-zag in time with hyperactive pop



Backgrounds certainly aren't as pretty as *Samba*'s but this barely impacts on the experience (and if you've got time to study them then you should probably be thinking about the professional tambourine circuit)

It was *Shakkato Tambourine* in the arcade, and, given Sega's financial state, most expected it to stay there. Then came the multiformat strategy announcement, and then the news that the follow-up to *Samba de Amigo* was heading to PSone. That was surprise enough; even more so was the new that the game was to be restocked with songs from kiddie J-pop girlband Mini Moni, and rebranded accordingly.

But despite the sonic makeover, the game remains the same, a played-straight percussion son of *Samba*. Dots radiate from the centre to one of six targets, which represent points where the tambourine should be held. When the dots strike the target, the player should be holding the tambourine in that particular area (top, middl or bottom, on either their left or right) and ha to perform an appropriate action, depending on the colour of the dot. This is where the game differs from its forefather – a large padded button on the face of the tambourin allows the game to differentiate between shakes and bashes, doubling the complexity of the Dreamcast rhythm-action classic.

The pose calls are gone, too, replaced with drawn-out arrows that mark paths through the sky, paths which the player must trace at the correct speed, all while jingling and jangling and, almost certainly, grimacing a little. *Mini Moni Tambourine* is physically punishing, much more so than *Samba*, since the majority of the effort is directed towards one arm. This also impacts a little on the effectiveness of the movement sensor, and only flamboyant Amigos used to switching sides with their maracas will find the transitions from left to right completely painless.

Still, the equipment is fundamentally sound, as is the software. Twenty Mini Moni songs are immediately available for singleplayer shaking, and the game grades players using an unsurprisingly similar (albeit much more forgiving) system to *Samba*'s. The emphasis, though, is on multiplayer, which is where those prepared to import two tambourines will profit most. Comparisons with *Samba de Amigo* reveal *Mini Moni* as weak; it's visually inferior, less instinctive, much worse aurally; and it's certainly aimed at a younger audience. But it's a wonderful party game, and that's how potential movers and shakers should judge whether to import.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Kingdom Hearts

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Square** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**105

This is a game where east truly meets west, a marriage that seldom works in the videogame universe. However, Square and Disney have always been long-distance soulmates despite their differing cultural expressions and *Kingdom Hearts* represents something of a triumph for both companies.

Final Fantasy artist, now turned producer, Tetsuya Nomura, has gathered a team of the brightest young Square things for his first project and has succeeded in creating an action RPG that, despite its flaws, manages to enthrall. In terms of mechanics think *Secret of Mana* combined with the PSone's *Dew Prism*. The central protagonist, Sora, is only 14-years-old and so refreshingly escapes Square's recent penchant for creating angst-ridden late teens. The team is completed by Donald and Goofy, who are characters you equip and develop but don't directly control in the fighting sections. The action is fast paced with, inevitably, the focus on character development and planning rather than complicated combos. Having said that, this is not simply *My First Action RPG* as the combat possibilities do become increasingly challenging as the game opens up.

The team traverses different worlds each with a particular Disney theme including Alice's Wonderland and Jack's Halloween town. Indeed, much of the game's enjoyment stems from the constant cameos from just about all the Disney and *Final Fantasy* IP you care to mention. The fact that the characters are well integrated in a flowing storyline bears testament to Square's abilities in this area. The voice acting is of a very high standard. Among institutions such as Brian Blessed, 'The Sixth Sense's Haley Joel Osment voices Sora, a small demonstration of how Disney cash has benefited Squaresoft.

There are, of course, flaws. Constant wrestling with the 3D camera is only partially rescued by *Zelda*-esque locking and hurts the game considerably. Moving between worlds is an overly complex affair featuring a complicated retro spaceship crafting and flying mini-game. Many of the areas feature tedious platforming sections but the fast-paced narrative stops these from grating. This is not just a game for children. Besides the fact that the themes are occasionally dark, many adults will find delight in the fact their favourite characters of yesteryear have, for once, come together in a crafted and highly enjoyable videogame.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten















This has been a key title for Square with the recent 72 per cent rise in company profits being largely attributed to its strong sales. A Japanese 1.5 version: *Kingdom Hearts Final Mix* featuring Sephiroth (among others) is expected

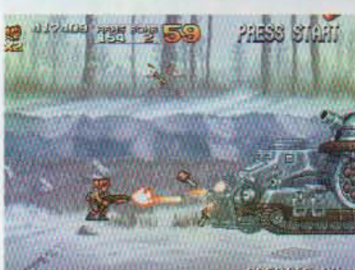
Metal Slug 4

Format: **Neo-Geo** Publisher: **Sun Amusement** Developer: **Mega Enterprise** Price: **$299 (£190)** Release: **Out now (US)**









Metal Slug 4's first level begins with an excellent motorcycle chase and a cameo role from series stalwart Tarma (top)





Logical regression

Those who cannot afford the entrance fee to *MS4* will be pleased to hear Playmore has now confirmed a *Metal Slug 3* port for PS2. Although this in no way secures the future of the series, it does hopefully mean that a new generation of gamers will be able to acknowledge excellent 2D style and animation as a thing of great beauty.





Thankfully the zombie transformations have survived from *Metal Slug 3*. Allow yourself to be touched by the living dead and you'll be able to spout blood in ways that Romero could only dream of

It is rare for **Edge** to feature the fourth instalment of any series that has remained fundamentally unchanged since its inception. But the *Metal Slug* franchise remains one of the most globally popular arcade action games and it's easy to see why. SNK's last game in the series, *Metal Slug 3*, is considered by connoisseurs to be not only the zenith of the series, but also of the 2D action genre. *Metal Slug 4* is a celebration of all that has gone before with the artists and animators at Mega taking the safe option and using the finest sprites and elements of the past games to create a pastiche of the series.

The departure of 2D maverick Takeshi Nishiyama, who steered and developed the series from Nasca's initial vision, brought the games success and viability into question. But to series veterans who can keep their fears and preconceptions at bay, Mega has done an admirable job of capturing the quintessence of Nishiyama-san's revolutionary visualisation of the one-man army.

In terms of gameplay **Edge** could supplant the formula synopsis from **E**95's review of *Metal Slug X*. Nothing much has changed: you travel along horizontal environments armed with a revolver, knife, grenades and a jump button. But as with all the finest gaming ideas the game is more than the sum of its premise. Much of the enjoyment from the series derives from the juxtaposition of the war-themed extreme violence with hilarious cartoon animation; something only the Japanese mentality could successfully achieve without giving cause for offence. Although Mega has adapted backgrounds and animations from the previous games, we are treated to some totally unique environments and one of the most competent soundtracks the series has yet enjoyed. But as with many works of pastiche it lacks the vision and coherency of its predecessors. Some elements feel rushed and many of the innovations in the third game, such as multiple paths through levels, new vehicles to ride and the huge game size have been cut down or dropped completely.

MS4 is an inevitable step down for the series. Mega had an almost impossible task given its lack of coding experience, living up to SNK's 2D programming legacy. However, given the game's solid core gameplay there is much here to enjoy and those who never played SNK's superior third game will wonder why they never visited before.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Rage of the Dragons

Format: **Neo-Geo** Publisher: **Playmore** Developer: **Evoga** Price: **$325 (£206)** Release: **Out now (US)**

This time last year 2D fighting aficionados mourned the death of their favourite Capcom rival. Whether Playmore's recent revivification of SNK is a success depends on the release and acclaim of original titles such as *Rage of the Dragons*. Although *King of Fighters 2002* is currently the most popular arcade game in Japan, simply publishing updates to the SNK's biggest hitting franchises will only fuel the embers for so long. *RotD* has two-fold significance. First, it represents the latest iteration for the *Double Dragon* lineage. More importantly, it provides an answer to the question of whether the keepers of SNK's flame can commission and publish original titles that can innovate and inspire in the ways their forefathers did.

Work on *RotD* began in November 2000 forming the first project for Korean codeshop, Evoga, aided and watched by an SNK Japanese affiliate, Noise Factory. Although the *Double Dragon* series has traditionally been side-scrolling fighting fare, Evoga has wisely opted for a tag-team fighter, a decision perhaps made in the light of the recent failure of Noise Factory's *Sengoku 3* in the arcade.

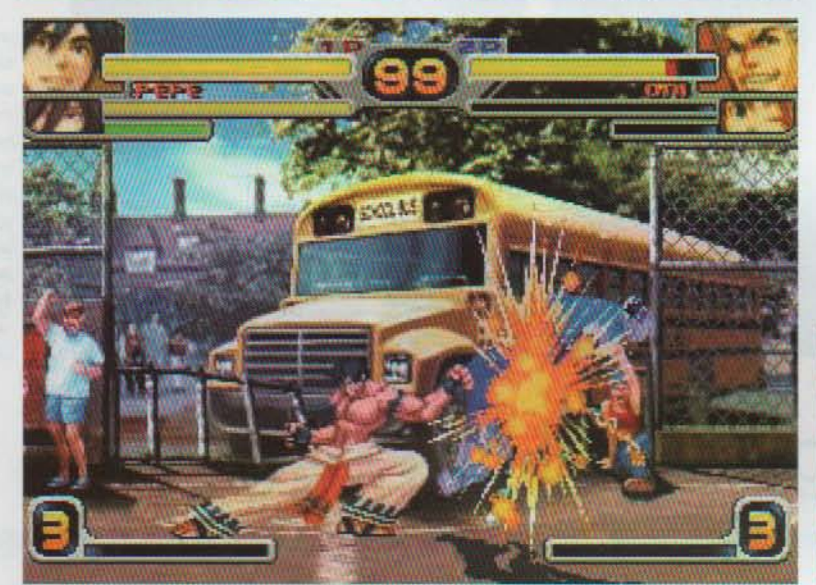
The fighting engine will immediately feel alien to even expert level players. Initial favourable impressions soon give way to frustration as the CPU mercilessly strings complicated combos on you even on the easiest setting. Although the staple quarter and half circle moves have been retained, the fast pace and myriad fighting options confuse. However, persist and it's hard to shake the feeling that Evoga is teaching you new ways to play one of the most primal gaming genres. Refreshingly, this is anything but a *Street Fighter* clone. Innovations such as the First Impact attacks, Team Duplex combos, in addition to traditional specials, can be linked together by those proficient in timing and skill. You'll find yourself showboating even when no one is watching. As with all the best fighters, few players can achieve true mastery but the system is accessible enough that within days you can attain impressive results.

Most gamers will have neither the funds nor dedication to buy this game when for the same price you can secure any one of the three major hardware formats. There is the possibility of a niche conversion, but for those who go the extra mile *RotD* offers something rare: innovation in one of gaming's core genres and solid enjoyment.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Hidden dragon

It's important to remember that this game is fundamentally an arcade venture designed to eat your credits. Failure to hold that thought in mind when approaching the game's exigent final boss will result in frustration of untenable proportions. If you can complete the game on one credit consider yourself ready for one of the many professional and amateur *RotD* tournaments that are already being held around the globe.









Evoga has done an impressive job of squeezing beautiful effects out of the 12-year-old hardware, for example the designers cited 'The Matrix' as inspiration for the air combo system (above right). The price tag will prove prohibitive for all but the wealthiest of fans, so the rest of us will have to hope for a conversion

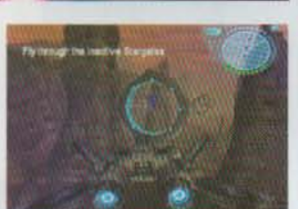
Defender

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E105**, **E112**









Just like in the original, aliens will try and make off with the humans scattered around the playing surface, and it's up to you to shoot the kidnappers and rescue the falling hostages. In two dimensions that was a joy; in three, erratic depth perception makes it nothing more than frustrating

A short, list of words you might associate with Eugene Jarvis' *Defender*: fast, thrilling, colourful, difficult, addictive, revolutionary. **Edge** had concerns about Midway's update as soon as the first batch of screenshots arrived; they were just so dreadfully brown, and if there's one colour *Defender* isn't, it's brown. Rainbow lasers tear across the screen, rip into fluorescent enemies with a satisfying crack, inertia spreads particles around your fighter as you nip nimbly between two flying saucers. That's the 1980 version. The 2002 3D remix is, well, *brown*.

Brown in colour and brown in mechanic. It's unremarkable subsistence gaming that bears less relationship to the exhilarating original than it does to a plethora of average thirdperson space shooters since. There are some nominal improvements, of course, but the plot, held together by vanilla FMV sequences, strips any creative abstraction from the player, and the ability to upgrade your ship and purchase new ones means you only really get moving when you reach the later levels. It's so predictable, one thing that *Defender* never was, and it makes you wonder how Midway can miss its own game's point by such a margin.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Dead to Rights (PAL)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Namco Hometek** Price: **£45** Release: **January 31**

Previously in **E101**, **E112**, **E117**

The biggest problem with the US version of Namco's *Dead to Rights*, reviewed in **E**117, was that it was so tough. A generation of gamers brought up to expect ending sequences as a right, not a privilege, suddenly found themselves struggling to get past halfway, and discussion boards lit up with cautious revelations of inadequacy from a community split 50-50 between approval and disgust. EA, publisher of the PAL version, has clearly taken note, and the game arrives in the UK with selectable skill levels, easier enemies and generously awarded health kits.

But these aren't the only changes. The auto-target is less prone to stupidity, a button is permanently bound to Shadow's quick attack and human shields are more effective. Then there are the extra combos, and configurable camera controls. Essentially, while the content hasn't been reworked, it's more polished, far easier, and all the more accessible because of that. EA's concessions to the nature of modern gaming – we breed them weak, these days – might be sneered at by some, but there's no doubt that most will welcome them. Others, bless their stubborn gamepads, can stick to the harder difficulty levels.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









It lacks *The Getaway*'s clean interface, but the combat is far better, particularly in the PAL version where an indicator arrow now points out offscreen enemies. Tossing canisters has also been reworked; Jack can now toggle away from his arcing missile if it's going astray

Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$30 (£19)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E113**

Nostalgia is a powerful thing. *Contra III* is so beloved among hardcore SNES gamers, not to mention several members of **Edge**, that it feels ungracious to print such a mediocre score at the foot of this review. But the simple fact is that revisiting *Contra* on the GBA does little for the series' reputation.

Two elements conspire against it. The first is its insistence on enemies with clockwork attack patterns. Forgivable in 1992, perhaps; today it just seems repetitive and unfair. Even compared to titles of a similar vein from the same era, *Contra Advance* is rote learning at its most persistent. The second is more problematic: the speed of bullets and peripheral action does not suit Nintendo's handheld particularly well. It's one thing to tackle kamikaze enemies with a SNES joypad and a TV monitor, quite another with the tiny GBA buttons and non back-lit GBA screen.

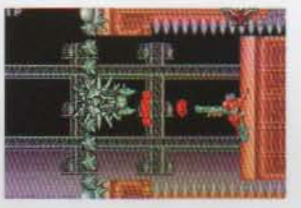
Fans may also grumble that the overhead perspective levels have been removed. Otherwise, *Contra Advance* is still a good example of a side-scrolling reflex game and some of the bosses are particularly imaginative. Just make sure you have a good light source before you fire it up.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









Like the SNES version, bosses work on the tried-and-tested Achilles' heel method of destruction and the enemy footsoldiers are suicidally clockwork in their movements but the harsh truth is that the *Contra* formula has not translated well to the GBA. On a more positive note, hardcore fans will be able to relive fond memories while the experience lasts, particularly when recreating the twoplayer option (via link-up)

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E112**





Persistent gamers will get a kick out of completing every mission in the quickest time possible. Rewards such as – wait for it – even more VR missions, and extra characters (so you can go through the same missions over again) will keep fans entertained for a very, very long time





Not the easiest game to pin a mark on. Mostly because *Substance* provides any gamer worth their salt with a main game they've already played through on PS2 (though extra dog tags are available to collect for the really obsessive), but more worryingly, because the main game is technically flawed. Slowdown is so prominent in this Xbox conversion that it's an embarrassment. It's hard not to conclude that the failing relationship between Konami and Microsoft is partly to blame and this update feels like a bodged job.

So *Substance* must be judged on the VR, Alternative and Snake's Tales missions alone, and very professional they are, too. With framerates in place they offer an enjoyable range of tasks to be completed under strict time pressures. Target shooting, stealth operations and bomb disposal elements all feature, and Snake's Tales are more lengthy and, therefore, more satisfying.

For those who relish time-pressure memory test gaming *Substance* is worth considering, and it's a huge package containing hundreds of missions. Others may feel a little let down by Konami's failure to bring anything truly fresh to the table.



Edge rating: Six out of ten

Big Mutha Truckers

Format: PS2 (version tested), Xbox Publisher: Empire Interactive Developer: Eutechnyx Price: £40 Release: Out now

Previously in E11



Despite a few secreted musical gems, *BMT*'s radio options are no match for *Vice City*'s range. The innuendo-heavy redneck humour works at times, but the same few looped gags and tunes soon begin to grate







Big Mutha Truckers is probably the most accomplished trucking game yet released. It's *Grand Haulage Auto*, more or less: drive-and-deliver gameplay punctuated with police chases, 'Duel'-style race-offs and other distractions. It does all the things that might be expected of a trucking game – miles of expansive fly-loaded highway, a friendly handling model, streams of traffic which only occasionally slowdown and a workable Paint mode for customisin your rig. It does all of these, but in practice, it doesn't quite come together. After all, it's still a trucking game.

It's not a racing game, it never gets fast or precise enough for that classification. It's not a resource management game, though success in buying and selling is the secret of progress in the Story mode. Th trading is only skin-deep, and the town sections in which it occurs little more than glorified menus. The mini-game adjunct provides a package of *Crazy Taxi*-like challenges that score higher for instant gratificatio but they don't make up for the void at *BMT*'s heart. To often, the game feels like a chore. Whatever the Steppenwolf song insists as the intro movie rolls, this is a trucking game and so born to be mild.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Star Wars Bounty Hunter

Format: PS2 (version tested), GC Publisher: Activision Developer: LucasArts Price: £40 Release: Out now

Previously in E11

Oh dear. LucasArts has actually managed to develop a title worse than the execrable *Obi-Wan*. On a positive note, some of the cut-scenes are accomplished, and the suite of unlockable extras is a well-worked touch. But that's about all. Otherwise, the game is a dire disappointment. Technically, it's a mess, forcing **Edge** to dig out *Shadows of the Empire* on the N64 to confirm that *Bounty Hunter*'s horribly bland textures and level architecture are only marginally superior to those of a six-year-old title.

Unfortunately, these are not the only flaws. There's the broken combat system that removes any challenge from gunfights, and the mission design that lurches from formulaic puzzles to clichéd bosses. Meanwhile, the inclusion of platforming sections highlights the inadequacy of the title and the stilted creative imagination that has apparently gone into its design.

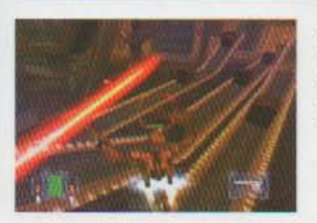
Indeed, the degree to which LucasArts has failed to capitalise on one of the more interesting characters in the 'Star Wars' milieu is staggering, though not as much as the decision to release such a poor game on a public that will, disappointingly, probably forgive the game on the basis of its licence.

Edge rating: Two out of ten









Each level includes a number of secondar bounties in a bid to increase replay value, but they add little enjoyment. And althoug Jango Fett's varied arsenal is accessible over the course of the game, some, if not most, of the weapons prove redundant



The making of…

John Madden Football

In 1990, Electronic Arts wasn't interested in doing sequels and John Madden thought the company was a "bunch of losers." So how did this NFL game become the most popular sports franchise ever?





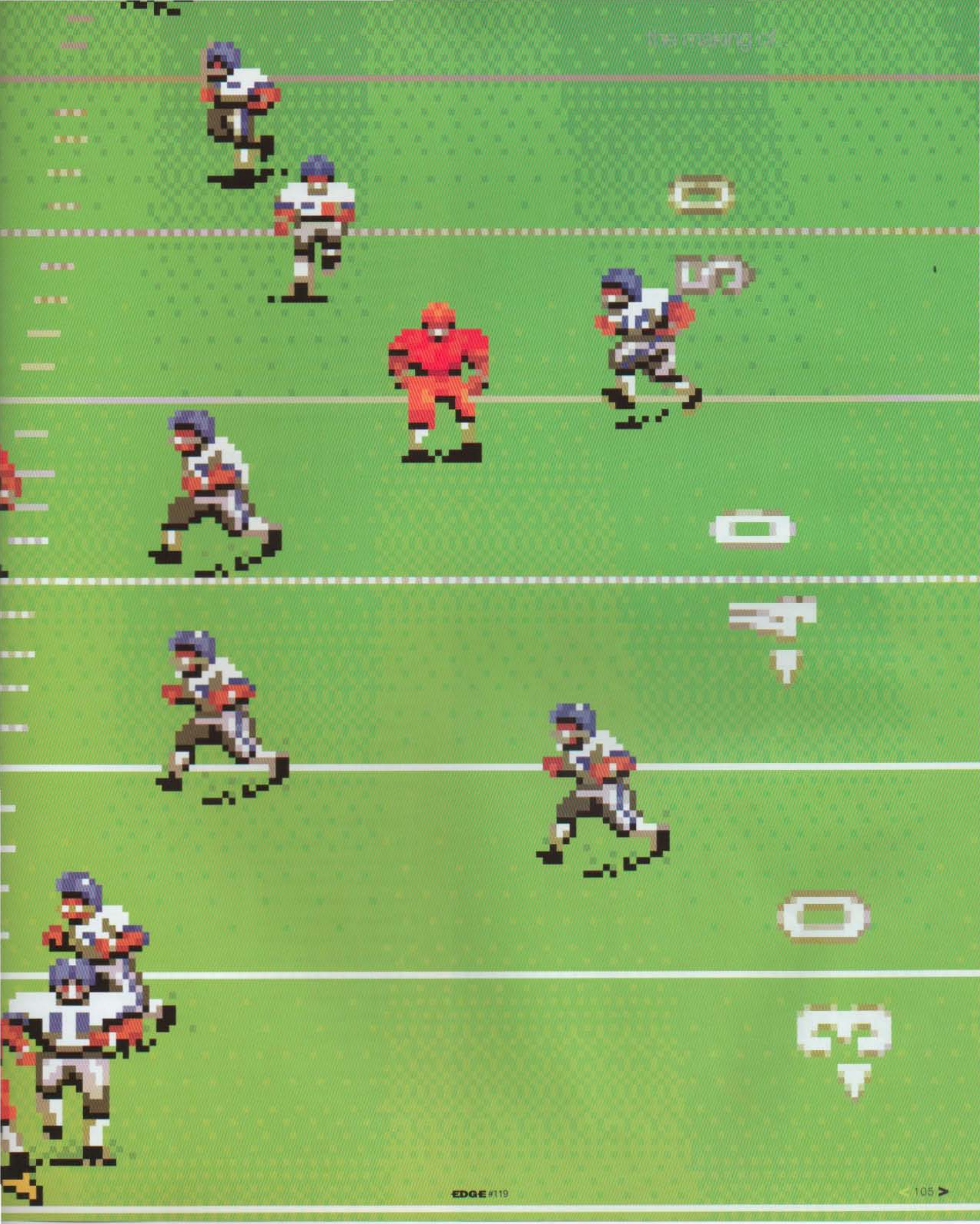
John Madden Football is the most popular sports videogame ever. For the past 14 years, Electronic Arts has released 15 different versions of the game resulting in sales of more than 25m units. Its success has made the Madden name a powerful brand, but that wasn't always true. Back in the late-'80s, EA's research showed that gamers were more interested in playing a game entitled *Electronic Arts Football* than one called *John Madden Football*.

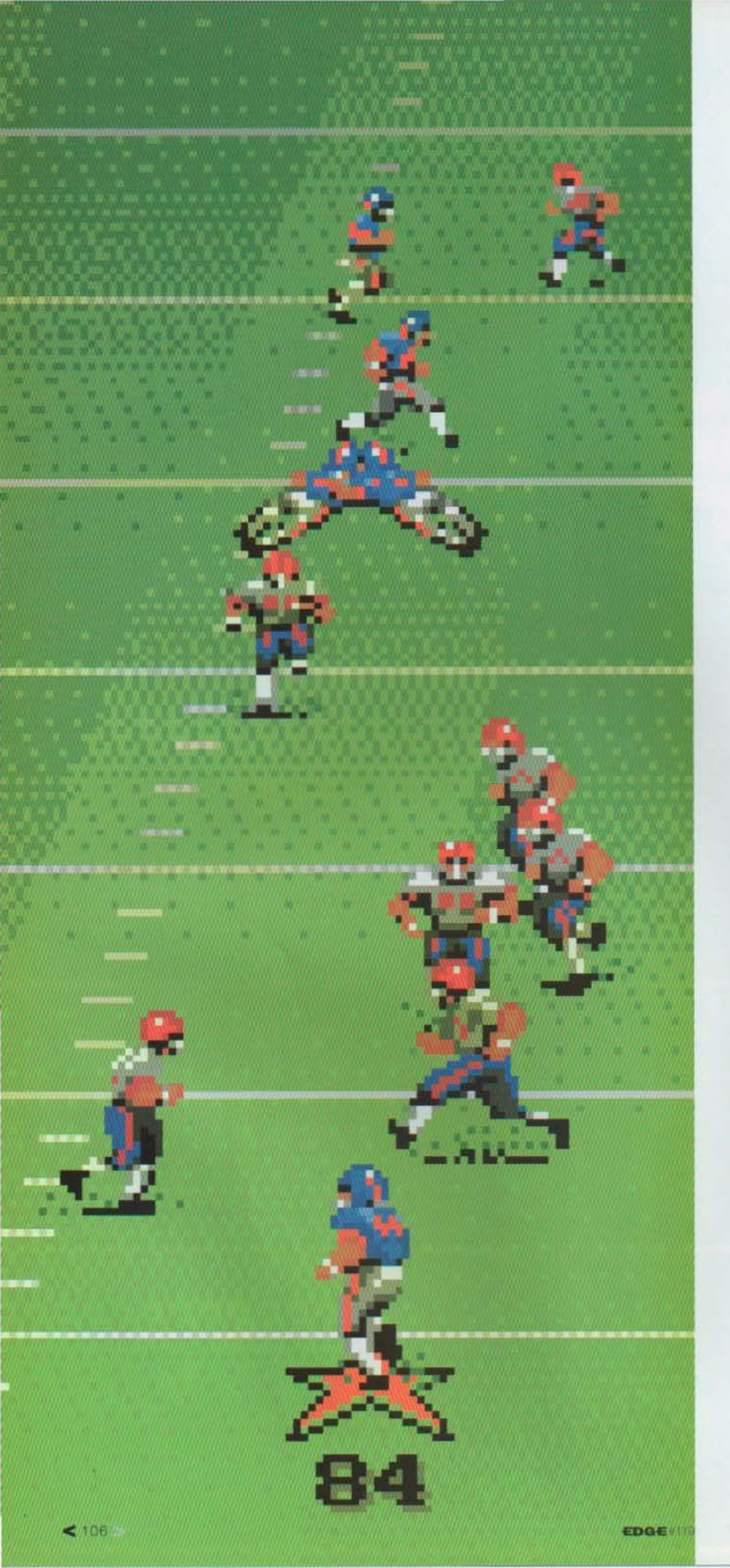
Few knew who Madden was. He hadn't begun broadcasting for Fox and most gamers were far too young to remember his coaching days with the Oakland Raiders. "Despite these research results," says **Bing Gordon**, EA's executive in charge of sport action games from 1987–1988, "our development team believed in Madden."

But what about Madden? Did he believe in EA? Did he want to be involved in a videogame? Trip Hawkins, the

Original format: **Sega Genesis**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1990**







founder and former CEO of EA, approached Madden and convinced him to pay attention to EA. Madden joined, but he wasn't a committed team member. His early relationship with EA was only that of a cover model for the box. Getting Madden to participate in additional public relations matters was difficult. "He thought EA was a bunch of losers," claims Gordon. But that ended with the introduction of the second *Madden*. (When the *Madden* team talks about the first *John Madden Football*, they refer to the 1990 Sega Genesis version, which was actually the second one after the 1989 Apple II version.) Unlike its predecessor, the 1990 Sega Genesis version achieved massive success and caused Madden's 'Q' rating, a measure of celebrity factor, to shoot up. More people now knew and liked Madden as a videogame designer than as a coach.

Joining Madden and Gordon and heading up the game's design were Rich Hileman and **Scott Orr**. Hileman hired Orr because of his work on the Activision title, *Gamestar Football*. The two complemented each other. Hileman was a simulation guy and a stickler for realism. Orr was the arcade guy committed to keeping the interface simple and intuitive.

Playing the field

In the mid-'80s, game designers were not playing on an open field. Computers and game systems had anaemic levels of memory and processing power. These limitations required developers to be selective as to how much activity they wanted moving on the screen. Creating a traditional 11-on-11 football game would not be easy. As Orr explains, "It was a real technical challenge to get 22 objects and a ball moving around on the screen." The best the engineers could do at the time was seven-on-seven. Madden looked at the early prototype and said, "What's this seven-on-seven? This isn't football. If my name's going to be on something it's got to be 11-on-11." So the team went back to the chalkboard. And after two years of development with the help of Jim Simmons, a talented architect/engineer, the team came up with an playable game of 11-on-11 football.

Memory game

There were still major memory issues. The team was forced to cut back lots of features. For example, they had to make compromises on the number of animations. And for any given animation, they had to limit the number of frames it could have. Recalling the frustration, Orr notes, "Memory impacted the scope and size of the game more than the performance of the game."

> "Madden's early relationship with EA was only that of a cover model for the box. 'He thought EA was a bunch of losers'"

The 1990 Sega Genesis version and the 1989 Apple II version were completely different. At the time, the 1990 Sega Genesis *John Madden Football* was different from all football games. All previous games had no realistic perspective. The view was from directly above, yet you saw players in side-view. "One of the breakthroughs about the first *Madden* on Genesis in 1990 is that we put you sort of behind the quarterback and we had basically this 3D effect with the field that was really amazing to see," says Orr. "It became the de facto standard to how all football games are designed and implemented today."

The only consistency between the 1989 and 1990 versions was Madden's philosophy on football. Using notes from Trip Hawkins' famous train interview with Madden (Madden doesn't fly), the two discussed one-on-one match-ups. "[According to Madden] the team that wins those individual match-ups and can play as a team overall is typically going to prevail. And that stuff was really insightful in trying to come up with a playfield for the game," says Orr.

The process of converting Madden's philosophy on football into a realistic videogame began with accurate player ratings. Rating football players was not a

new concept for videogames. Many sports games in the early-'80s had ratings, but they were often rudimentary (ie speed, strength, agility, etc), were not connected to any specific professional player and lacked credible validation. Gordon set out to change the standard with *John Madden Football*. He began by developing ratings based on player statistics and reputation. To improve the authenticity of the simulation, Gordon says, "I reviewed NFL tapes of four NFL games to model the actual second-by-second behaviour of all 22 positions on the field." He measured blocking, tackling, passing and pass-rushing events to measure success rates, outcomes for players given their varying skill level, their position and whether or not they were being double-teamed.

Ratings war

The second-by-second simulations, the one-on-one match-ups, and the new player ratings brought about a whole new level of realism that no football game had previously achieved. The ratings within *John Madden Football* became the standard against which all other sports games would be compared. Professional football players that were also *John Madden Football* gamers would call EA and complain. "I'm underrated. I've got good hands and in the game I keep dropping the ball." But not everyone was upset with their ratings. **Jerome Bettis**, a running back for the Pittsburgh Steelers, shocked EA when he called and said, "I'm playing the game and I appreciate what you guys did but you made me too good."

Valid statistics and ratings became an important part of *John Madden Football*. Even though EA and retailers didn't want a sequel, Hileman and Gordon realised that they needed one in order to maintain the simulation's realism and because fans demanded stats updates at least annually.

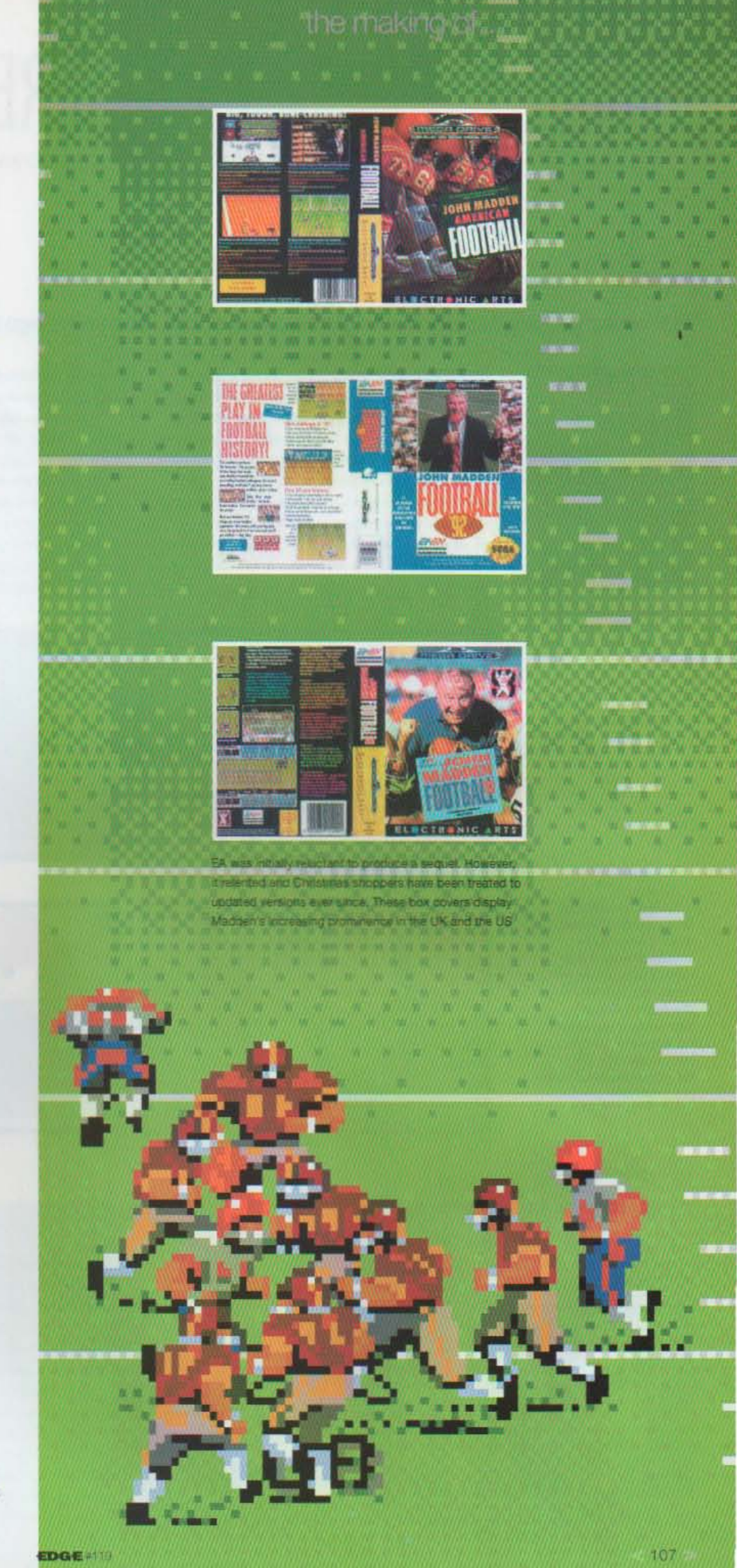
"A big breakthrough for us was with the Genesis controller having multiple buttons," says Orr, "With the Commodore 64 and the old Atari we had the joystick with the one button. And we mastered the tap versus hold technique with the button to get multiple functionality out of it. But now all of a sudden we had three buttons and it opened up a whole new world of possibilities. Receivers could be associated with a button for passing and multiple functionality could be built into those buttons, depending on whether you tapped or held the button."

"In the early versions we introduced this concept of a passing window which was essentially an iso-cam on each of the three receivers," explains Orr, "and the idea was that as quarterback, if a guy on a deep pattern was offscreen you didn't know if he was open or covered. So, in addition to giving you an interesting visual, these iso-cams allowed you to see if your guy was open or covered. In later years the perspective was brought down and pulled back and so we didn't have to use the windows anymore. At that point we were able to do other tricks where you'd zoom in on the action after the pass was thrown."

Birds of a feather

Initially, *Madden*'s AI comprised lots of tables and random number calculations. Surprisingly, random calculations would result in some reasonably realistic situations that would only need a few simple tweaks. For subsequent versions, the level of calculation increased significantly. At one point the *Madden* team hired an engineer with a PHD in flocking behaviour to design algorithms where players would converge on another and tackle him. Unfortunately, those algorithms were so sophisticated that they took up all available processing time. Instead, the *Madden* team used the principles behind the models in the Sega Genesis versions. Years later with the release of the 3DO platform, the team finally had a system powerful enough to handle the flocking algorithms.

Over the years, Madden stays in touch with the EA *Madden* team to make sure new strategies and trends in the NFL are reflected in each subsequent release of the game. For Orr, who left EA to start the mobile phone gaming developer Sorrent, it's all about balance. With any given play, if you made the right call then you could stop your opponent. His favourite compliments from players were always comments such as "this feels like the real deal," or "this is so much fun," or "this is so addictive." When the team got to this level they knew they had hit the sweet spot.



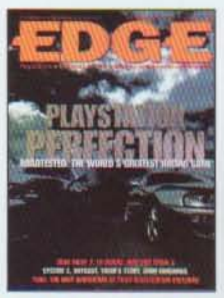
EA was initially reluctant to produce a sequel. However, it relented and Christmas shoppers have been treated to updated versions ever since. These box covers display Madden's increasing prominence in the UK and the US

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 55, February 1998

Gaming's silly season comes in the post-Christmas lull. Gossipy **Edge** rumoured that Arnold Schwarzenegger looked set to star in a film based on *Doom*, revealed that Max Clifford had been signed up to promote *GTA* and, craziest of all, that *Heart of Darkness* was actually going to be released. More substantial were the revelations concerning Sega's Saturn follow-up – this month called Katana – which Sega Europe officially announced would debut in the west in '99. Not before time, either, as Sony's attempts to crush all life from the Saturn were on the point of proving successful, with titles discounted to $5 in the US, and EA and Capcom announcing an end to their software support.

Still, rumour fans might have been disappointed to note the lack of M2 murmurings this month, but that's not to say 3DO was entirely absent from the issue. "*Army Men* promises to have some of the best AI routines seen in this genre," said **Edge** of the first game in the series. Who could predict how easily promises are broken? And broken again. And again, until you've got a franchise synonymous with massmarket nonsense. Talking of which, *GT* scored a ten.



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"Any good game tends to sell well. It isn't a problem at all for us." **Edge** wonders if Tetsuya Mizuguchi feels any different now he's seen the sales figures for his marvellous *Rez*?

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"Crash, there's something you should know while you're visiting my country. We all think you're crap." **Edge** puts words into PaRappa's mouth, captioning a picture of the two characters enjoying a cup of tea.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Gran Turismo (PS, 10/10); *Yoshi's Story* (N64, 7/10); *Winter Heat* (Saturn, 8/10); *G-Police* (PC, 8/10); *Wild Choppers* (N64, 6/10); *Snowbow Kids* (N64, 6/10); *Heavy Gear* (PC, 7/10); *Nagano Winter Olympics '98* (N64, 6/10)



1



2

1. *F-Nano*, a homebrew MSX version of Nintendo's racer 2. *Army Men* – remember when it was nothing to be scared of? 3. An(other) Indin award for The **Edge** 4. *Outcast*, impressing in Prescreen 5. PaRappa and Crash discuss demographics 6. *Grim Fandango*: gorgeous even in pre-production



3



4



5



6

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Alex Verrey aka Big Boy Barry, PR manager at Joytech, remembers a gaming epiphany





Mario 64 was a game capable of raising the hair on Alex's arms. And his head, it would seem

I was a mere few years old, when my dad presented my brother and I with a rubber-keyed wonder, the trio of *Manic Miner*, *Hungry Horace* and *Hunchback* enthralled for months. *Cookie*, *Target Renegade* and *New Zealand Story* grew alongside me, long before Big Boy Barry was born. But *Mario 64*. Sweet Jesus.

When this title surfaced, I'd been working in videogames for a few years, beating young and old on satellite TV, and recording a weekly videogame show. I was already well accustomed to my beloved PlayStation, and believed I'd seen it all. I was wrong.

Words alone fail to express my delight at handling the bizarre analogue stick for the first time. Mario was no longer a collection of pixels. He was a living, breathing creation. An extension of the Big Boy, reacting to my every whim, in a magical world without walls. So mesmerised was I with tip-toeing, leaping, bounding, swimming and even just letting the little fella fall asleep, it was days before I even began playing. Of course, when I did, I discovered that this was not just a work of art, but a once in a lifetime slice of interactive nirvana. A game that truly restored my faith in the medium, a game that still raises the hair on my arms, and a game so perfect, and so polished that, to this day, it stands as the best example of a 3D game. Perfect.

FAQ

Naoto Ohta

producer, SCEI

Before moving to SCEI in 2000, Ohta-san spent his days at Capcom where he was involved with *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, *Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix*, *Red Earth* and *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. Apologies to those who were expecting a review of Ohta-san's latest production, *Ape Escape 2*, this month. **Edge** promises to finally review this in **E**120. No, really.

What was the first videogame you played?
If you're talking about home videogames, *TV Game 15* was the first game I played. It was a game very similar to the father of videogames, *Pong*. If you're talking about arcade videogames, it's *Super Breakout*. I remember playing it at an Onsen Ryokan (an inn with a hot spring). By the way, the home videogame version of *Super Breakout* was a game Shigeru Miyamoto produced in his early days at Nintendo. I wanted it very badly, but ¥30,000 at that time was very expensive for a poor elementary schoolboy.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
The first computer machine I owned was an X1 from Sharp. Although NEC personal computers had the biggest share at that time, I was so happy to be an X1 user when *Xevious* came out that I thought I might die.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
A lot of routine chores. Between chores, I was told to think of ideas (one idea every three days, later one idea per week) and eventually, I prepared a total of 20 to 30 ideas. However, this past experience has helped me a lot as a game developer. At that time, I was with Capcom and the first game I developed was *NUMu*, an action puzzle game. It was considered an experimental game internally, and if it had grown into a fun game it would have been released. However, *NUMu* wasn't fun at all. So it was not released.

The first game I developed that *was* released was *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. I was in charge of game design to balance adjustments, basically all the main development aspects of the game. This is where I learned the basics of being a professional. Due to the character of the game, I had to look over the whole development process and schedule, work as a team with various people, understand the importance of networking with people, and receive harsh claims from customers, etc. By the way, Mr Okamoto (presently the COO of Capcom) is responsible for the silly name for this game. In the car park at Capcom's headquarters, I caught Okamoto-san, who was coming back from a very busy day, and showed him a couple of sample names. Either he was very tired or very troubled, because he simply said, "I like the idea of adding 'II' to a first game and 'Turbo' seems cool. Why don't you also add the word 'Extra'?" He laughed, and walked away. However, since the game was actually released with this silly name, Okamoto-san might have been really happy with the name.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
It's a very difficult question. *Crazy Climber* (Nichibutsu), *Xevious* (Namco) and *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo) would be the three games that I've really liked the most.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Recently, I've been too busy to play games. I know it's not good, but let me emphasise that playing games doesn't mean that you are able to create better games.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
To be honest, it's very close to zero. However, a few years ago, I would forget to sleep and play games for hours. Even now, if I do bump into a great game, I don't sleep. When I concentrate, I *really* concentrate. That seems to be me.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
I won't look for anything specific. I would go for games that jump into my eye. Usually, they are the ones that are most popular.

"A few years ago, I would forget to sleep and play games for hours. Even now, if I do bump into a great game, I don't sleep"

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
This is also a very difficult question. Since I'm always hungry for new things, my favourites change quite frequently. Films might be easier to answer. 'Leon', 'The Shawshank Redemption', and 'Nuovo Cinema Paradiso' are films that I love. I also like exciting Hollywood films.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
www.asahi.com – this must be one of the most popular news sites in Japan.



What game would you most like to have worked on?
None. But if I had to choose, the first *Virtua Fighter* (Sega) might be the one.

Of all the games you've been involved in, what's your favourite, and why?
Of course, *Ape Escape 2*. It's because I've put the most energy into it.

What stage is your current project at?
For the PAL version, it's almost at the stage of mastering.

What disappoints you about the industry?
Developers that don't think, copy other people's ideas and forget to invent games.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
To see the faces of people enjoying a game.

Whose work do you most admire?
Hideo Kojima.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
The platform that clears the language barriers.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
There's room for improvement. I think one of the reasons for this is that not many competent people in the frontline are involved yet. If the environment, especially the hardware, improves, new and attractive content should arise.

inbox

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Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I am a graduate of a Computer Games Design degree and I started looking for a job in the industry as soon as I received my final grade. To aid my search I signed up with an agency which has been quite helpful so far. However, I was recently informed that developers are refusing to look at CVs if the candidate doesn't have a minimum of two years' experience. Apparently publishers are demanding to see the CVs of all employees who will be working on a project because they are no longer happy handing over money if a lot of inexperienced staff are working on it. I can't attribute blame to developers that are over a barrel in this situation and powerless not to meet the publishers' demands.

This puts me in a very poor position as my degree was squarely aimed at the games industry and to be honest I've wanted to be part of the industry for a very long time. I know sooner or later that my continuing hard work will pay off and the current outlook is promising, but it's a sad reflection of today's climate that somebody such as myself feels they have worked for three years to achieve a graduation certificate that frankly isn't worth the paper it's printed on.
Anonymous

This example of publisher risk aversion is a new and particularly worrying one. Nevertheless, it is a depressingly familiar tale of industry short-termism that hardly bodes well for the future. With the number of publishers investing in new IP already low, news that some are also hampering the growth of new development talent is dispiriting.

I recently decided to buy a PlayStation2. However, I can't stomach paying higher prices for inferior PAL versions of games. The reason I (and many others) prefer NTSC machines is because of their 60Hz refresh rate, and the consequent 'smoothness' of graphics. So-called PAL 'conversions' are usually nothing of the sort, a meaningless catchphrase to roll out non-existent 'improvements' and explain delays in release schedules. To prove that point, it is possible for those making (ahem) backups of their games to simply patch the 'backup', changing whether it runs at 50Hz or 60Hz. With that in mind, it is amazing that not one of the current console manufacturers has included user switchable 50/60Hz output in the console itself, when this is obviously possible. There can hardly be a TV made in the last ten years that can't take a 60Hz signal, and chances are the 60Hz mode would be default for most gamers – at least if they were to see the benefits for themselves.

So, requiring a PS2 on which I can achieve 60Hz on all games, I first looked at buying an American PS2. Sony, however, has used stern warnings to its dealers (I know, I worked for one on the receiving end) not to sell imported product – or for American dealers not to export it if they want to be supplied at all. One of the Web's most popular dealers in all things import and backup related, www.lik-sang.com in Hong Kong, has been stopped from selling any backup-related item (and that includes anything to allow the use of NTSC games on a PAL console) by a consortium including Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony. Their sights will swiftly move along until each and every obvious source of such products has been brought to heel or has been threatened with annihilation.

So, thanks to the measures Sony & Co. use to prevent a legitimate transaction between a US seller and a European buyer I have been pushed into the hands of the desperados they seek to crush. In order to play US games, I bought a Messiah 2-modded PS2. As a side effect of course, I've bought a machine capable of running pirate copies, simply because it was easier than finding a dealer in the US who would ship, and the unit itself offered the ability to play PAL games.

Historically, the ability to play pirate copies on chipped PlayStations was a direct consequence of a chip designed to allow imported games to be played, circumventing the region detection at boot – think about that one Sony. When PSone originally came out, just comparing the PAL and NTSC versions of *Ridge Racer* sent me straight to the import shop and then led to the fitting of a mod-chip – as was the case for many others.

Sony, Microsoft and their ilk imagine that if the[y] close off all avenues for their product to be sold from one market to the next, that people like me will be resigned to buying PAL product, but the truth is that if it wasn't possible for me to buy the[m] mail order, I either wouldn't buy them at all, buy pirate NTSC copies in desperation, or I'd take a large bag on holidays to the States each year.

What happened to the global market? It's easier for the big companies to move about and market their wares all over the world, but it's as hard as ever (and getting harder) for a consumer t[o] enjoy the benefits of a global economy. Alongside DVD region coding, the region coding of games and the restrictions imposed on dealers of games not to ship internationally or import legitimate product surely constitute some form of illegal restrictive and anti-competitive practice.

Not so long ago, it wasn't uncommon to hear ridiculous claims, that these imports didn't work o[n] local machines because of TV system incompatibility, or that imports might 'break' your machine, fund local triad gangs or invalidate your warranty. Microsoft is fond of suggesting that imported software "may" be illegal to scare off customers and dealers. But the simple fact is that import games won't work as a consequence of deliberate engineering to that end

Australian courts are the only ones that have seen through the veil of half truths and outright lie[s] – they have ruled that it is illegal for the manufacturers of games and DVDs to deliberately restrict their customers from legitimately importing and running software from other markets. Howeve[r] it remains to be seen if this will have any results.
Aonghus de Barra

The issue of region-coded software and hardware continues to be a thorny one. Indeed **Edge** was recently criticised by a Sony employee for failing, i[n] their eyes, to realise that region coding is a

"When PSone originally came out, just comparing the PAL and NTSC versions of Ridge Racer sent me straight to the import shop and then led to the fitting of a mod-chip"



David O'Connell argues that few adult gamers really have the time to invest in a title as lengthy as *Super Mario Sunshine*. He might have a point...

fundamental constituent of current videogame publishing business models. That may be so; certainly there are advantages for the marketing and licensing departments of developers, publishers and console manufacturers, as is demonstrated by the failure of publishers to take up Microsoft's offer of region-free Xbox software. But in our opinion, such rigid region coding doesn't have to be essential. Quite apart from the fact that, as you correctly point out, it contributes to the problem of piracy by encouraging the sale of mod-chips, relying on restricting trade to increase revenue would seem to be the mark of an immature industry in light of recent trends towards globalisation and liberalisation of cross-border transactions. Expect a full **Edge** investigation soon.

Steven Poole's column (**E**117) on *Super Mario Sunshine* marking the end of a gaming genre, had particular resonance for me. I am a gamer in my mid-30s with a family, and consequently a limited amount of time to invest in a game. *Super Mario Sunshine* is beautiful to play, and brilliant in many places but despite its colourful playschool charm, it's pure hardcore.

I now understand why gaming is still not mainstream; it's much too frustrating. I bought *Resident Evil* for the GameCube, but despite initially enjoying it, have abandoned it only a quarter of the way in. It is a stunning looking game but it is very hard. I want to finish games in a reasonable amount of time. A game packed with 30 hours of gameplay but most of that time consisting of repeating stages or being forced to wander back and forward ad nauseam, is not how a normal person wants to spend their time.

The industry has got it wrong. I am more than willing to spend £40 on a game. If it only lasts ten hours but I enjoy each one of those hours then it's £40 well spent. But there are too many other things in life, including other great games, such that any game that demands 30–40 hours to complete is making an unreasonable demand for most people. And a game that I complete is usually one that I remember fondly, making me amenable to the thought of buying a sequel.

I doubt the industry really knows what percentage of gamers actually complete games. My gut feeling is that more than half the games bought are never completed, abandoned at that point in the game where people make a sane judgement call about all the other interesting things they could do with their life, rather than restart that damn level yet again. I may be in my 30s but I suspect that younger gamers are just as likely to leave games unfinished.

The industry is mistakenly trying to provide longevity when actually most people really don't want it. They want short snappy concentrated experiences, much like a film provides, not all-consuming time sinks. Someday, the hardware will allow genuinely large worlds that will allow people to spend significant amount of time in gaming worlds without constant repetition. However that time is not quite upon us.

Until it is, I applaud Nintendo, for making games such as *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin* relatively short and easy. For me, and I suspect a large proportion of the population, the length of these games was perfect, allowing me to balance playing games with the rest of life. I just wish they had done the same with *Super Mario Sunshine*.
David O'Connell

One industry pundit recently (perspicaciously) compared buying a game to buying an entire series of 'The Sopranos' on DVD. But currently, videogames aren't broadcast in smaller episodic chunks. You're right to commend Nintendo for trying to innovate by producing games that make more manageable demands on players. However, until the industry is prepared to take collective action on this, it's unlikely that anything will change. Still, it would be nice to think that the industry is mature enough to entertain a debate about pricing – perhaps charging in the region of £40 for a game like *Vice City* (akin to an entire film trilogy), while charging something closer to £20 for a title such as *Luigi's Mansion* (akin to an individual film). Judging by the reaction to the recent Fairplay Campaign though, this is unlikely to happen in the near future.

I have long been confused by the terms 'hardcore gamer' and 'casual gamer', two terms that seem to be thrown around with reckless abandon. What is a hardcore gamer? What is a casual gamer? I find it very hard to develop criteria which sorts gamers into two such distinctions. Surely everyone plays games for fun?

I don't think the console one owns is a factor in determining whether a particular gamer is hardcore. Perhaps a gamer's skill level is the deciding factor; are you hardcore once you've mastered a certain set of games? If you have completed *GoldenEye* on 00 Agent difficulty then you are a hardcore gamer, if not, a mere casual gamer? I think this is slightly dubious.

Having failed to reach a conclusion, I put the question forward to anyone with an answer: what are the criteria for defining hardcore and casual gamers?
Curtis Jewell

While **Edge** largely attempts to steer clear of sweeping generalisations: **Edge** is a hardcore gamer; your mum's a casual gamer.

I'm still thinking about Nagoshi's words. It was the first article I read in **E**117, and I can't bring myself to read on before sending my thoughts to you. In my opinion the problem with manuals is that they are written once for the territory the game is initially made for and very rarely localised properly. As an example to illustrate my point: in the credits section of the German *Armored Core 2* manual it says "Armored Core 2 von Software Development Team", translating the "From" in "From Software" by using the German equivalent "von," making "Software" the name of the developer. How then, am I supposed to trust the translator from that point on? Will she/he be able

"A game packed with 30 hours of repeating stages or being forced to wander back and forward ad nauseam, is not how a normal person wants to spend their time"



Agent Under Fire; proof that today's average games can be just as entertaining as their old-skool predecessors, even if it's not exactly high art

to explain the game mechanics in a good way? At all? I'm glad I simple-mindedly started the game without consulting the manual, though, unfortunately the manual is also needed for information about the various *AC* part descriptions.

The interesting thing is that in both the film and book industries, translations are usually pretty good – certainly compared to most videogames. But then, there are always the Nintendo manuals. I love them, regardless of what language they're in because they speak in colours and pictures.
Anonymous

It's nice to see the current interest in the history of our industry; I am approached nearly every month now by researchers and authors interested in Microdigital, Imagine and the early Codemasters days. Soon it will no doubt be available as a degree course. Your articles on 'Game of Chance' and *Bandersnatch* were startlingly accurate except for the spelling of my name. I was responsible for coming up with the names of the megagames; *Psyclapse* I made up and *Bandersnatch* was stolen from the Lewis Carroll poem 'The Jabberwocky'.

People remember Imagine mainly for its spectacular collapse but we did achieve a lot and in many ways laid the foundations of the industry. When we started most developers/publishers were kitchen table efforts and Imagine did nearly reach a turnover of a million pounds a month and was a proper company with functional departments (and lamentable financial management). All the other developers/publishers either became proper companies as well or disappeared.
Bruce Everiss, Codemasters

Oops. Please accept our apologies.

After reading E118's Inbox, I'm sorry that Mark Doyle and David Valjalo (and many others, no doubt) have become so disillusioned with modern videogames. I'm not here to argue the case for *Army Men* and the like, and admittedly both Mark and David make valid points about the number of disappointingly average games around at the moment, but I feel they're missing a basic tenet of the videogaming market (and, indeed, all other entertainment media); there'll always be crap. As David says, he's grown up with games, so surely he can remember all the unoriginal, shoddily-executed "arcade-style" rubbish we've had to wade through on every system ever produced?

Yes, the majority of new games are designed by committee, running the risk of stamping out any trace of originality in the pursuit of massmarket appeal, but there are still a few auteurs out there (Molyneux, Miyamoto, Mizuguchi). These few are keeping the spirit of bedroom coding alive by stamping their unique vision on everything they do, and that's what makes their games worth playing.

So if you're prepared to dig around, there's the occasional gem nestling in the dirt. But the best thing about the continued expansion of the industry is that even average games are getting better. A few recent examples; *Hunter: The Reckoning*, *Rally Fusion*, *007: Agent Under Fire*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. None are triple-A titles, but each is satisfyingly entertaining when considered on their own terms.

In an ideal world every game produced would be an original, intelligent, groundbreaking masterpiece. Of course, I'd like to see more games following the lead of *Ico*, *Rez*, *Halo* et al. But if modern TV, cinema and chart music aren't perfect, why should gaming be any different?
Will Wallace

***Halo*, having been** out for quite some time, hit quite cleanly on the head the solution to the problem that has dogged the more complex breed of console FPSs – the simple idea that control pads do not offer precision aiming as part of the package, in contrast to the PC mouse and keyboard. Clearly, there are two schools of thought for the FPS genre – highly accurate precision systems, and far more forgivable 'arcade' systems. One of them does not belong on consoles.

And so, why is it that we still see control systems that do not take into account the strengths and weaknesses of consoles, by simply cloning the standard formula that works so well on PCs? I'm obviously not the only one that found *MoH: Frontline* to be infuriatingly tricky to control; *Turok Evolution*? Don't even go there. Even the people who single handedly created the first proper distinctions between the PC and console setup for FPSs, Free Radical, fall short of the mark with the much hyped *TimeSplitters2* – sure, the game engine worked like a dream, and was furiously addictive, but by leaving out something as simple as an aiming reticle and dropping the auto-aim to minimum use while simultaneously enforcing highly accurate weapons usage left a great many number of people, I'm sure, punching walls and dropping consoles from great heights in frustration.

FPSs on consoles need to help their players, because their control systems restrict them – what that means is striking up a balance between auto-aiming, so perfectly showcased in *GoldenEye*, as smooth as possible control stick movement as featured in *Halo* and a reticle that is a little wider than a few pixels, so as to forgive often sluggish analogue stick movement, again, shown to perfection by the weapons of *Halo*. *Halo*'s perfect analogue stick pitch and forgiving levels of accuracy negated what little auto-aiming was present in the game, while *GoldenEye* provided a generous amount of auto-aiming to make up for its slightly less forgiving aiming system.

I feel few developers are going to develop as fine an analogue stick pitch as Bungie has, so really the true balance has to come between auto-aiming and a merciful crosshair – expecting the player to be able to make pin-point shots using anything less than a sniper rifle is short-sighted of the differences between the mouse and keyboard combination, and the use of a control pad. I personally think developers should take note of this and adapt their games exactly to the type of interface the player is going to be using.
Anonymous

"Of course, I'd like to see more games following the lead of Ico, Rez, Halo et al. But if modern TV, cinema and chart music aren't perfect, why should gaming be any different?"





To wander aimlessly or to wander in search of an aim? That is the question being pondered by Luke and Rev. The answer lies in the difference between the "tedious" *Star Fox Adventures* and *Animal Crossing*, one of Luke's most played games

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

S
Pobject: **Aimless Wandering**
Theter: **Luke**
on tother day the *Star Fox Adventures* advert was
havele TV and my girlfriend said, "You've got that,
my hat you?" I confirmed that I did have it, and
them usemates then asked what it was like. I told
most chat the graphics were lovely but that I spent
what to my time just walking about looking for
My edo next and I found that a bit tedious.
then saic-housemate who was visiting at the time
always pi "Isn't that like that other game you're
She waying?" (referring to *Animal Crossing*).
It's odd s kind of right I guess.
things I like that aimless wandering is one of the
Metroid Pr least in games (I was almost put off
for ages bme after aimlessly wandering around
obvious), bfore I noticed I'd missed the blindingly
much desut. *Animal Crossing*, a game pretty
wanderingned around the concept of aimless
g; is one of my most played games.

Poster:
Aimles **nemo**
far ins wandering is basically all I have done so
bor *Morrowind*. Nothing useful at all. Haven't got
ed yet, either.

Po
Poster: **Rev**
What's being described is subtly different. In *Animal Crossing*, *Morrowind*, etc, you're aimlessly wandering. In *Star Fox Adventures*, *Jedi Knight II*, etc, you're wandering looking for the aim. Subtle like I said, but basically in the first one you're given the opportunity to wander and choose it. In the second you shouldn't have to wander but are forced to.

Subject: ***The Getaway***
Poster: **Legend**
Just played *The Getaway* demo. 100 per cent pure f****** class! As a Londoner I recognised most of the streets, and couldn't believe it when I drove pass the IMAX theatre. It is wicked to see UK streets, people, vehicles all in a game. The cockney gangsters, the homage to 'Reservoir Dogs' and 'Lock Stock' in the boss confrontation. I hope the whole game plays as well.

Poster: **pretentious_helvetica**
I wonder if "pure fucking class" is rhyming slang for "shit."

Subject: **Cubism**
Poster: **SamSim**
Forget cel-shading versus realism, games should go cubist. Or pointillist. Or surrealist or try to emulate a watercolour feel with their graphics, or one of the many other graphical styles that artists have used in the past. It would be an interesting step to see some developers try to undertake. It would also improve gaming's aspirations to artform status.

Poster: **Jpickford**
Yawn.

Poster: **grand master meio**
What about *Mojibribon*? I wish I could remember my hiragana then I might be able to play it when I get it. However, if that isn't trying something new with graphics then what is? I must say that I hate cel-shading for the sake of it. Imagine what would happen if developers got it into their heads that an impressionist render engine was 'cool' (I'm sure it would be possible-ish now) in a similar way to the way they're doing with cel-shading. Imagine a flight sim that looked like an animated version of a poor, badly contextualised Monet, yuck. Imagine even a playable *Wreckless* replay, with all the crappy effects piled on top of each other, bleurgh.

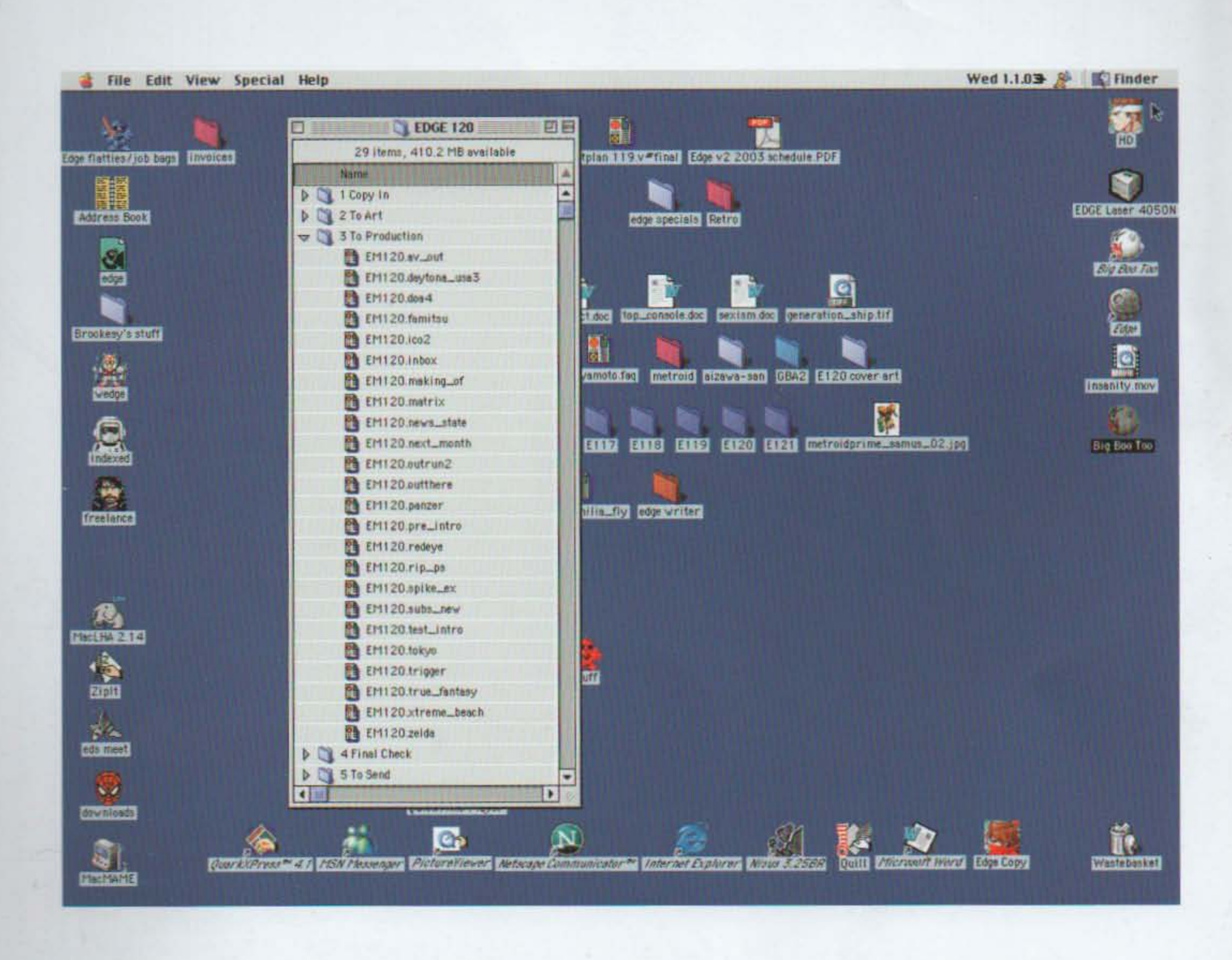
Poster: **Jpickford**
Apologies for being negative again. But surely an impressionist render engine is a contradiction in terms? A CPU does not have impressions. What you are talking about is packaging a faux-impressionist style for no other reason than it's different. This is not an idea, it's an iteration. The people who came up with realtime cel-shading had an idea. Taking that and applying other styles isn't creativity, it's depressing me-tooism.

Poster: **Kensei**
Nope, you're being overly negative and for once, plain wrong. Cel-shading just opened up the possibilities. Cel-shading made a lot of people go, "Whoa!" and start wondering what else is possible, what the bounds are. Personally I'd like to see a fantasy RPG with a "faux-impressionist" rendering engine, because I think it would add a lot to the feel of such a game. Plus I'd reckon there's a fair few gameplay possibilities opened by it. Or suppose a samurai game where a character retells a tale, and it's all done in traditional samurai artwork. That'd be class. And btw CPU's don't have impressions, Programmers do. It's like saying CPU's don't think so we shouldn't use it for calculation. CPU's are just a tool of the programmer. Be careful your cynicism doesn't dent your creativity. Especially you, since you make the games.

"It's odd that aimless wandering is one of the things I like least, but *Animal Crossing*, a game pretty much designed around the concept of aimless wandering; is one of my most played games"

Next month




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